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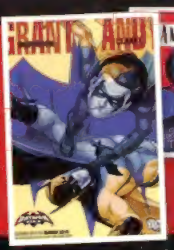

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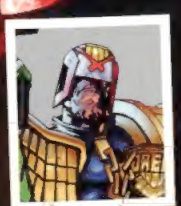

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"You know why I'm eating a raw potato? It reminds me of your head."

BORAG THUNGG, EARTHLETS!

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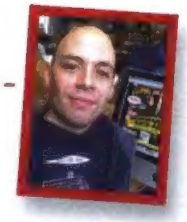
I am The Mighty Tharg, alien editor of award-winning SF anthology *2000 AD*, and I welcome you to the scrotnig first issue of *Comic Heroes*!

The Galaxy's Greatest Comic has been in publication now for 33 years – its sister title, the *Judge Dredd Megazine*, celebrates its 20th anniversary this very year – so I believe I can safely claim without lapsing into Betelgeusian hyperbole that I've been around the four-colour block a few times. Over the past three decades, I've seen the comics market adapt and evolve more times than a Kroogian chameleon, and throughout all that time, comics have remained a vital and vibrant medium, telling stories with a sophistication and verve you won't find anywhere else.

Now, as we enter the second decade of the new millennium, comics are as popular as ever, and as diverse as ever – you'll find movie adaptations such as *The Losers*, *Kick-Ass*, *Iron Man 2* and *Scott Pilgrim* slated for release this year, the shelves of your local bookshop groaning with graphic novel collections, and strips available to download and read on your iPhone or PSP. While the multimedia age advances apace, the desire to lose yourself in a good comic never changes.

So what better way to explore the comics world in 2010 than with *Comic Heroes* as your guide?

Keep it zarjaz, Terrans. SPLUNDIG VUR THRIGG!



LOOK! UP IN THE SKY!

Blimey. I grew up reading *2000 AD*, my childhood informed by Nemesis the Warlock, the ABC Warriors and Joe Dredd; if you'd told me then that I'd one day be sharing page space with The Mighty Tharg, I'd have gaped in disbelief and kicked you in the shins. And yet here we are, fronting a brand new magazine – one that celebrates the wide, weird and most definitely wonderful world of comics and their heroes, from *Iron Man* to *Tintin* and all points in between.

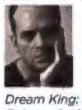
I hope you enjoy reading *Comic Heroes* as much as we enjoyed creating it – and I'd love to hear what you think of it, and what you'd like to see in future instalments. Drop me a line at **comic.heroes@futurenet.com** and let me know. Enjoy the issue!

Jes Bickham,
Editor

MEET THE TEAM

Say hello to some of our own comic heroes...

JOSEPH MCCABE



Joe is the West Coast editor of *SFX*, an editor of *Comic Book Artist*, and the Bram Stoker Award-nominated author of *Hanging Out With The Dream King: Conversations With Neil Gaiman And His Collaborators*.

ROB WILLIAMS

Rob is a comic and magazine writer whose credits include *Wolverine*, *Punisher Max*, *Deadpool Team-Up*, *GQ*, *Indiana Jones*, *Star Wars*, *The Word*, *Robocop*, *Judge Dredd* and *The Financial Times*.

MICHAEL MOLCHER

Mike interviews artists and writers for the *Judge Dredd Megazine*, has written about comics for *SFX* and produces the apocalyptic magazine *The End Is Nigh*. He doesn't think they'll ever reprint *Death Planet* either.

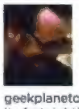
DANIEL ETHERINGTON

Daniel Etherington has written about movies and videogames for more than a decade, spending a questionable proportion of his earnings on a comic book collection that now threatens to collapse the attic floor.

GUY HALEY

Guy has had one comic published: it was called *N-Jinn*. It never got past issue 0. He's also edited the games magazine *White Dwarf* and worked for *SFX* when he was a callow youth. He's now neither callow nor youthful.

CHRIS BROSNAHAN



Chris has been reading and collecting comics for most of his life, and is a big fan of Alan Moore. He is the editor of movie/comic/TV site www.geekplanetonline.com and co-hosts its fortnightly 'Eclectic Podcast'.

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CRACKING CON!

Bristol Fashion

Want to wallow in all things comics for a couple of days? Then you'd best head to the West Country! **By Rob Williams**

It's an annual highlight for British comic fans, and this year the Bristol Comics Expo – with Chris *'X-Men'* Claremont as guest of honour and Image Comics making its first official UK convention appearance – seems set to be bigger than ever.

Held over the May 21-23 weekend at the Ramada Bristol City Hotel and the Mercure Hotel, the Expo, sponsored by Com.x, becomes the centre of the UK comics scene each year. It's packed with big-name creators, editors, distributors and fans, all coming together for sketchings, signings, panels, back issue bins and a lot of quality bar time. The UK scene, as you'd imagine, is always well represented, but each year expo organiser Mike Allwood also manages to tempt some major international names to make the plane trip over to the West Country.

"This year, coming from America, we've got Phil Noto (*Batman/Doc Savage*) – who I rate as one of the most innovative artists currently working in comics – making his first UK con appearance," says Allwood. "Plus Spain's Jesus Saiz (*Checkmate, The OMAC Project*) and Ramon Bachs (*Red Robin*) will be attending. Oh, and our guest of honour has a pretty impressive CV. We're knocked out to have got Chris Claremont."

Claremont is one of the biggest names in the business, being the writer who took *The Uncanny X-Men* to huge popularity during the '80s and '90s. He crafted the now famous personas of Wolverine, Storm, Nightcrawler, Kitty Pryde and the rest of Marvel's mutants, turning an ailing comic in fear of cancellation into a modern cultural phenomenon.

Image Comics will also be making its presence felt. Publisher Eric Stephenson is making the trans-Atlantic journey, as is Brit-in-exile Richard Starkings (*Elephantmen*), and *The Walking Dead*'s Charlie Adlard will be producing an exclusive *Walking Dead* print, which will only be available at the Bristol Expo.

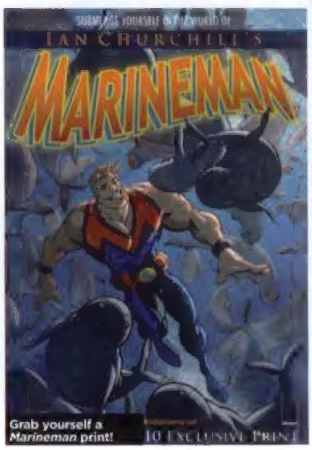
Other Expo exclusives include a free ashcan from another forthcoming Image book, *The Bulletproof Coffin* from David Hine (*Detective Comics*) and Shaky Kane (*2000 AD*), as well as a preview of *Hulk* artist Ian Churchill's new creator-owned Image book *Marineman*, a *Judge Dredd* print, a variant cover edition of Markosia's new graphic novel *The Dark*, and a limited edition *Com.x 2010* sketchbook sampler, featuring concept work from various artists for the British publisher's critically-lauded graphic novel *Forty-Five*.

> **"IT'S THE CHANCE TO OVER INDULGE A LIFE-LONG PASSION FOR COMICS!"** MIKE ALLWOOD

ALBION RISING

The UK's top creators will also be in attendance, with people such as Alan Davis (*Captain Britain*), Mike Carey (*Lucifer*), John Higgins (*Watchmen*), Jock (*The Losers*), Mark Buckingham (*Fables*), Lee Garbett (*Batgirl*) and Paul Grist (*Jack Staff*) available for sketchings and signings throughout the weekend.

"While waving the UK flag, we'll also be adding new international



X-CELLENT!

THE BEST THERE IS AT WHAT HE DOES...

When Chris Claremont took over writing *The Uncanny X-Men* in 1975, the struggling book was killing time, running repeats of old material. During his 17-year tenure as X-writer, he created classic storylines including 'The Dark Phoenix Saga', 'Days Of Future Past' and Wolverine's first solo adventures, helping to make the *X-Men* Marvel's number one franchise. Just prior to his departure from the *X*-titles in 1992, the Claremont-written *X-Men* #1 was released. It sold eight million copies.

There's an exclusive *Walking Dead* print!

tangents to the show, and we have our biggest ever European Spotlight," says Allwood. "Working with Cinebook, we hope to show that it's not all *Tintin* and *Astérix* out there!"

For all the big-name guests, Allwood is just as keen to use the weekend to promote the indie, small press grassroots of the UK comics scene.

"The standard of the UK's indie creators is, in my opinion, without equal," he says. "With the convention now being held at two hotels for the full weekend, we can expand on our Small Press Showcase, which has been a cornerstone of the show over the last 12 years. The bar seems to be raised every year and with limited chance to 'break through' into the pro publishers, the indie creators continue to produce a stunning array of titles. This will always be at the top of the expo's 'to do' list."

Phil Noto will be at Bristol. Fact!

And for *Star Wars* fans, there'll be the chance to celebrate the 30th anniversary of *The Empire Strikes Back* with members of the 501st Legion's UK Garrison. We'll be on site too – members of the *SFX* and *Comic Heroes* teams will be attending the Bristol expo to celebrate our launch. "The remit I use is that the convention is the type I'd want to attend," says Allwood. "It's the chance to over-indulge a life-long passion for comics!"

STAR POWER

THREE UK LEGENDS

Veteran artists collide in Bristol!

Under the subtitle 'Together For The First Time', the Bristol Expo is showcasing three of Britain's finest veteran comics artists.

John M Burns, currently the artist on *2000 AD*'s ever popular *Nikolai Dante* series, has a career stretching back to the '60s and including titles such as *Look-In* and *TV Century 21*. He's perhaps best remembered for his work on the *Modesty Blaise* strip for *The Evening Standard* during the late '70s.

Although Mike Noble was a contemporary of Burns on *Look-In* and *TV Century 21*, his career goes back to the '50s and includes memorable work on strips such as *The Lone Ranger*. He also drew *Star Trek* and *Fireball XL5* comics, which are remembered fondly by many.

Meanwhile, Scottish artist Syd Jordan was the creator of the *Jeff Hawke* science fiction strip that ran in *The Daily Express* from 1955 to 1974 and enjoyed huge success in Europe when it was translated. Seen by many as one of the most influential sci-fi strips of its time, it was reprinted by Titan Books in 2008.

Burns is the artist on *Nikolai Dante*.

There's a brand-new ashcan comic too.

Claremont's *X-Men* remains a classic.

Pat Mills will host a panel on *Requiem*.

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We're intrigued to see how *Thor* works on the big screen.

HEROES ON FILM

Making Their Marvel

With *Thor* and *Captain America* on their way to the big screen, Marvel is certainly not resting on its movie laurels... **Joseph McCabe** investigates

With plans for the post-*Iron Man 2* Marvel movies moving full-steam ahead, we recently heard from two of the key players in the studio's future franchises – actor Sir Anthony Hopkins and director Joe Johnston. While both men were in Los Angeles promoting *The Wolfman*, they spoke a little about their next projects.

"I'm enjoying working with Kenneth Branagh very much," said Hopkins, sporting the beard he'll wear as Odin in *Thor*. "A terrific young director... Well, not that young, but younger than me."

Hopkins said he's not reading many *Thor* comics in preparation for his role. But what he has read is teaching him a little about the mythology that will inform Branagh's epic.

"I'm not a great researcher. I'm not into [comics] culture. Like *Wolfman*, this is a big cultural thing isn't it? I've never been caught up in that. I'm not well-read in Norse mythology, more in Greek mythology and Roman mythology; although I'm learning a bit through comic strips now, about Odin and Mjolnir and all those guys. I know that Thursday's named after Thor and Wednesday's named after Woden or Odin. It's interesting stuff. The history of the Vikings is very interesting, the Viking invasions of Europe."

"Will we find him? I don't know. It's tough"
JOE JOHNSTON

ABOVE: Thor from Marvel's *The Ultimates*.

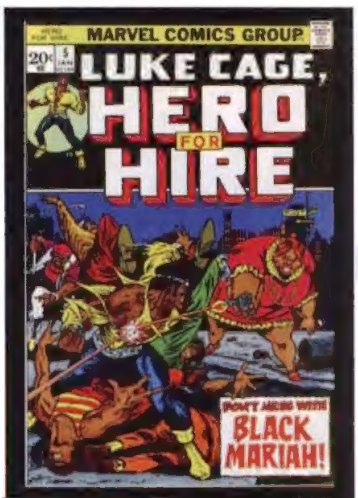
Johnston revealed that his *Captain America* will be shot in HD (though not 3D), and that its visual style will differ from that of other Marvel films.

"We're definitely gonna shoot it in a different way than any of the other Marvel pictures that have been shot. What I'm trying to do is to look at the comics, most of the new ones, most of the [Ed] Brubaker series, and to interpret that sort of visual style into a film in a way that I think has been tried before but it always looks a little too on the nose. It looks like, 'Oh, they're shooting a comic book movie.' I want to try something different."

Johnston added that casting for his film will be completed by 1 March and – despite rumours that Chris Pine could star – he hopes his Captain will be an unknown American actor.

"I don't think we could make the film without an American playing the part. We may not be casting in America, because we're going to London, and we'll probably shoot in the UK for most of it because it takes place in Europe. We're looking for a complete unknown. You won't recognise him, and we'll surround him with more prominent names. I mean, that's who we're looking for. Will we find him? I don't know. It's tough."

Also tough will be delivering the big set pieces within his budget: "We have to pick our battles because it's a little more than we can afford right now. But there are some great action sequences. Stuff we haven't seen before."



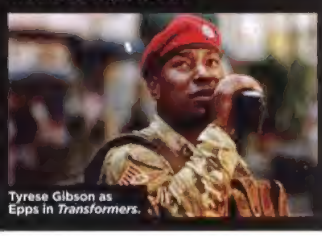
UNCAGED!

WILL LUKE CAGE BREAK FREE?

COMIC HEROES TALKS WITH THE MAN WHO WOULD BE POWER MAN...

While much attention is on Marvel's A-list Avengers movies, such as *Thor* and *Captain America*, actor Tyrese Gibson (*Transformers*, *Transformers: Revenge Of The Fallen*) reminds *Comic Heroes* that his role in John Singleton's *Luke Cage* could still happen, though recent events have brought challenges.

"It's like development hell, man, y'know?" he tells us. "That's one of the most legendary, strong, black comic book characters there is. So I believe there's so much more pressure to get that script right over other Marvel projects. This transition – with Disney buying Marvel and all of that stuff – has created a few more delays. If that opportunity presents itself, for it to finally get done, I would love to be Luke Cage. I would love to be Power Man. That would be my honour."



Tyrese Gibson as Epps in *Transformers*.

EVOLUTION OF A WALLET

WANT TO KNOW HOW MUCH WORK GOES INTO CREATING *COMIC HEROES*' LOVELY PACKAGING? HERE'S AN INSIDE LOOK AT HOW IT EVOLVED...

1 The original idea was to have a split Tony Stark/Iron Man image. Didn't work.

2 Nice! War Machine and Iron Man... but used by another magazine. Gah!

3 Hit Girl and Iron Man! But everybody said, "Who's the little purple girl?" Ah.

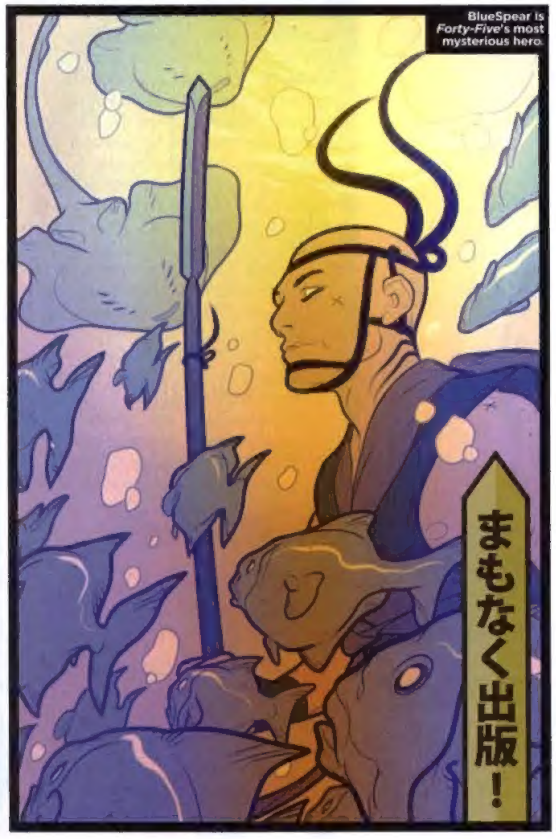
4 Three characters! But too similar to last year's *Comic Heroes* special. Hmm.

5 The final thing. Big yellow banner. Comic panel background. Mmm!

5 THINGS WE'VE LEARNT THIS MONTH

1. Marvel Comics has Venom soap dispensers in its toilets...
2. **...And a poster of Bullseye telling you to, ah, make sure you don't miss. If you take our meaning.**
3. They also have their in-office heating on really, *really* high.
4. **We massively underestimated writer response to our 'How To Write Comics' feature. It was originally five pages and ended up as 14.**
5. Marvel editor Axel Alonso would love to see a Deathlok movie.

Calum Alexander Watt is on art duties for *BlueSpear*.



BlueSpear is *Forty-Five*'s most mysterious hero.

EASTERN PROMISE

From The Depths

Brit publisher **Com.x** plans to expand the super-powered world of ***Forty-Five*...**

With *Forty-Five* currently raising eyebrows thanks to its unusual and imaginative approach to superhero comics (see page 118 for our review), writer Andi Ewington is on a roll. So much so, in fact, that he and Com.x editor Eddie Deighton are beavering away on a *Forty-Five* spinoff, called *BlueSpear*, with artist Calum Alexander Watt.

It's a 40-page one-shot, due in early 2011, and will focus on the titular character, one of *Forty-Five*'s most enigmatic and mystical, and the defender of Tokyo to boot. His page in *Forty-Five* focused on his normal brother, Akira, who is troubled by his sibling's transformation and distant relationship. But why did they choose BlueSpear, out of all those heroes?

"When Eddie and myself were editing the interview with BlueSpear, we instantly found an appeal with him. From my point of view he was ultra-composed yet devastating when forced into action. I liked the fact he was probably one of the most powerful heroes in the world of *Forty-Five*, yet he wasn't western-inspired," Ewington tells *Comic Heroes*. As for his brother, Akira? "Well, there's an emotional link between the two brothers that we push much further in this particular one-shot. He's a very detached and outwardly unemotional superhero, yet still considers himself a guardian of Tokyo and of his brother, Akira. It's his uncertain origins that make him so interesting!"

Eddie Deighton goes one further. "I think his attributes are what we, as readers, find most enduring. He's got that 'Shane' vibe; that lonely, silent warrior with the undetermined past. He has his predetermined convictions, his own moral code by which he abides and, although detached from all physical emotion, his primary objective is the safety of his family and people."

"When Eddie & myself were editing the interview with BlueSpear, we instantly found an appeal with him"
ANDI EWINGTON

BlueSpear, then, certainly seems to be an unusual, and therefore fascinating, strain of superhero. But there's a lot more to choose from in *Forty-Five* – can we expect further adventures in the style of *BlueSpear*?

"Certainly," says Ewington, "*BlueSpear* is only the beginning of a small story arc that will develop over several issues. Ideally, I want to expand with stories about X, SkyLine and even the Lotus!" CH

Some concept work for *BlueSpear*. Looks pretty nice, no? Yes.

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Expect more Green Lantern fun as Guy Gardner returns.

Aquaman, plus friends and foes, is poised to take action.

SPECIAL REPORT

A Bright Future For DC Comics?

Geoff Johns takes creative control just in time for *Brightest Day*... **By David West**

It's been a gloomy time in the DC Universe of late, with the dead rising in *Blackest Night*.

However, there's light at the end of the tunnel for DC's heroes, with the arrival of *Brightest Day* in May. Fan favourite Geoff Johns will be writing the twice-monthly series with Peter Tomasi, alongside a roster of artists that will include Ivan Reis from *Green Lantern*, Patrick Gleason of *Green Lantern Corps*, *Superman/Batman*'s Ardian Syaf and Scott Clark of *Justice League: Cry For Justice*

"*Brightest Day* is about second chances," says Johns. "It's been obvious from day one that there are major plans for characters from *Aquaman* to take centre stage, among others, post-*Blackest Night*. *Brightest Day* isn't a vague catch-all direction for the DC Universe – it's a story. Nor is it a sign that the DC Universe is going to be all about 'light and bright' superheroes. Some second chances work out... some don't."

A third *Green Lantern* title will be spinning out of *Brightest Day* – Guy Gardner takes centre stage in *Emerald Warriors*, with Peter Tomasi and artist Fernando Pasarin at the helm. Geoff Johns has plenty to celebrate with his new role as chief creative officer in the re-structured DC Entertainment, where he'll be guiding the company's expansion alongside co-publishers Dan Didio and Jim Lee.

Is *Brightest Day* a brave new dawn for the DC Universe?

"Some second chances work out... some don't"
GEOFF JOHNS

ALL CHANGE

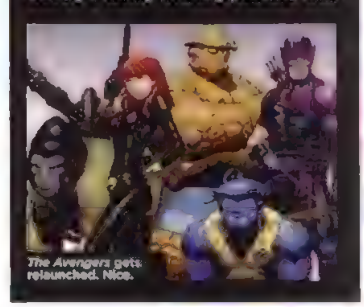
A LAND FIT FOR HEROES

MARVEL READY TO BRING HEROISM BACK TO SUPERHEROES

Marvel has announced the dawning of *The Heroic Age* this May, in the first major cross-title event since the company's acquisition by Disney. The Marvel Universe has been dominated by massive multi-title events in recent years, from *Civil War* to *Secret Invasion* to *Siege*. *The Heroic Age* is intended to breathe new life into the Marvel roster and provide a readily accessible jumping-on point.

All four current *Avenger* titles wrap up in April to make way for *Avengers* #1 by Brian Michael Bendis and John Romita Jr the following month. Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, Spider-Woman and Hawkeye have all been confirmed for the new Avengers roster, although there will be a second team of Secret Avengers running concurrently.

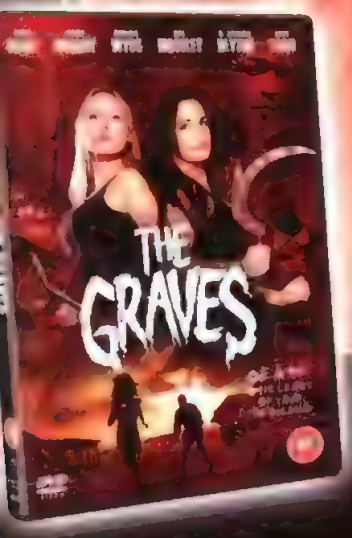
Luke Cage will take command of the Thunderbolts, while *Astonishing Spider-Man/Wolverine* will be a monthly pairing of Marvel's highest profile heroes. Given Marvel's continued dominance of the US comic market, is *The Heroic Age* just the latest big banner-head event, or does it mark a desire from Disney for a happier, sunnier Marvel Universe more in keeping with the rest of Disney's family-friendly product line?



The Avengers gets relaunched. Nice.

"I LOVE ALAN MOORE"

"I LOVE NEIL GAIMAN"



THE GRAVES

The New Movie
From BRIAN PULIDO
the acclaimed comic book creator
of LADY DEATH and EVIL ERNIE

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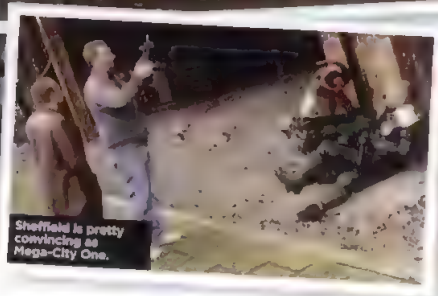
The film aims to recreate the gritty feel of the *Dredd* comics.

Edmund Dehn plays Judge Minty himself.

The cast and crew of *Judge Minty*.


Sheffield is pretty convincing as Mega-City One.

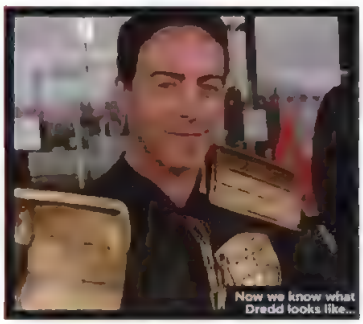
SPECIAL REPORT

The Cursed Earth On Camera

The Judges make their way to moving pictures once more, thanks to dedicated fan action... **By Michael Molcher**

A desolate city landscape, lawless bands of perps, razor winds blowing through factory ruins... no, not Mega-City One, as you might think, but modern-day Sheffield.

A hardy band of fans have gathered in sub-zero temperatures amid the Steel City's industrial wastelands to help bring the world of *2000 AD*'s Judge Dredd to life


Now we know what Dredd looks like...

While work on the new Hollywood adaptation gathers pace, director Steven Sterlacchini and his comrades are doing their bit to wipe away memories of Sylvester Stallone's 1995 box office flop with their 15-minute fan film based on peripheral *Dredd* character Judge Minty

But this is no amateur effort, with its paid actors, licensed costumes from Termight Replicas, industry-standard cameras and professional CGI effects. Veteran actor Edmund Dehn – who starred in children's TV role-playing series *Knightmare* – plays Minty, an ageing Judge forced to retire and take 'The Long Walk' into the radioactive Cursed Earth... a location ably supplied by the freezing North Wales landscape. And after spending some 20 years drawing the character, strong-chinned *2000 AD* artist Greg Staples has a cameo as Dredd himself. A small cast of enthusiastic fans, dressed in boiler suits and wielding prop guns, shiver as they wait patiently for their turn in front of the camera.

"The Stallone film wasn't right. This is the kind of film we'd want to see"
STEVEN STERLACCHINI

Designer-by-day Sterlacchini, who's funding the production from his own pocket, says fan movies have come a long way with their professional production standards: "I always wanted to make films, but years ago it was impossible because of the cost. Now the technology's available and we're working with professional people who give their services for free because they're fans too. The standard we can achieve for nothing now is incredible

"Many fan films are just sequences of CGI and costumes, but we're trying to tell a story," Sterlacchini adds. "We're going back to the source material, and by focusing on a character like Minty, we can tell a bit of the *Dredd* story without really using Dredd himself. The Stallone film wasn't right. This is the kind of film we'd want to see – gritty, hard and close to the comic book."

And after spending hours on the freezing pavement of Sheffield's Magna industrial museum, Dehn says he's loved taking part: "I'm not being paid for this, but it's far too much fun not to do. Dressing up and pulling a gun on people when you're in your fifties is great. It's a labour of love for them and it's great to be a part of it."

SEZ DEZ: DOWNLOADS!

THE SKINNY

In which British comics legend **Dez Skinn** – who, among many other things, ran Marvel UK, has won over 20 industry awards, and created *Warrior*, *Doctor Who Weekly* and *Comics International* – waxes lyrical in a regular column...

Perhaps it's not the most superheroic way to grab your attention for an opening paragraph, but isn't it amazing that in a post-punk, possibly pre-apocalyptic society, here in the dear old UK milkmen still leave full bottles by your front door and nobody nicks them? I mean, come on... the prisons are overcrowded, inflation's running rampant and dole figures are bulging, but nobody would dream of breaking that unspoken rule, smashing one of the last bastions of our quaint old society... pinching the milk.

Well, it would be stealing. Theft. The unbearable guilt, the absolute shame of it, would haunt us to our graves. But downloads? Ah, now that's a different matter. We've all been merrily bootlegging somebody else's copyright material ever since the invention of the audio tape recorder. And as the technology has moved on, so has the choice of what to bootleg – videos, CDs and now, courtesy of the world wide web, just about anything!

Even comic books.

But that's a weird one. Comic books are carefully crafted for print. It's not just about the individual frames. Artists have been known to throw hissy fits if a full-page advert breaks up a spread – because of the initial impact. Think about it. It's a relatively subliminal thing, but when you physically turn a page your eye first takes in the next two-page spread long before you focus on those itty-bitty speech balloons. It's the nature of the beast. Chances are you became comics-literate soon after starting primary school – you somehow accepted that absurd concept of speech balloons, narrative panels, thought balloons and sound effects existing in the same visual world as the characters you were reading about. Surreal stuff.

There's never been a Comics 101, to my knowledge, which actually told the reader that those cloudy bubbly outlines mean thinking. You just quickly learn to know it. In fact, there was a BBC Radio 4 *Book Programme* a few years back where the four panellists were given a copy of *Watchmen* to review and two of them admitted they actually couldn't read it; they weren't comics literate. They just didn't get it! And that was with nice and uniform squared off pictures on a nine-frame grid. Hardly taxing. Imagine how they'd have coped with Jim Steranko's psychedelia on *SHIELD* or Frank Bellamy's jagged and dripping borders on *Eagle*'s *Heros The Spartan*? So much for Radio 4 (the shame!)

But we're talking downloads here. And you could argue that you can print out a download. Sure. And collate and staple together all 32 pages, then rush to your nearest PC World for another bunch of madly expensive colour cartridges. Not terribly cost-effective, that, even with today's prices for comic books. Because we are talking about today's crop here. Forget archive material going all the way back to the first *Batman* and *Spider-Man* comics ('cause they're all up there too!).

"Besides, we're collectors. We wouldn't dream of taking advantage of online comics, would we?"
DEZ SKINN

It would be blatantly encouraging such piracy were I to namecheck the sites, but they're up there offering this week's comic books online – all of 'em! It's amazing considering how many are being pumped out each week. Even more amazing, the corporate owners of *Spidey*-publishing Marvel and *Supes*-producing DC – the heavyweight Disney and Warner Bros corporations – seem incapable of stopping them. No sooner do they scare one off but two more replace it.

So we're not talking licensing here, heaven forbid, but an army of people scanning all this stuff in – unless the publishers are still naïvely sending out promotional e-copies thinking they'll only be used for review purposes. There is the point that downloads can undermine the viability of the real thing, plus creatives are losing out on their royalties, and the counter-argument that freebies increase the profile of a title and its creator. But we know all about that through constant battles over film and music.

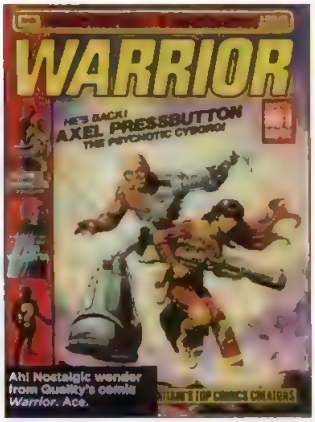
Besides, we're collectors. We wouldn't dream of taking advantage of online comics, would we? The printed form isn't a 20th century phenomenon, replaced by technology to be read only on screen, is it? We like the feel of our comic books, the smell of them, the sheer thrill of turning that page. They're a tactile experience that we read, bag and treasure.

Anyway, reading online makes your eyes hurt, doesn't it? And we'd never steal bottles of milk either!

Dez edited this for a whopping 16 years.

Alan Moore's *V For Vendetta* was first published in *Warrior*.

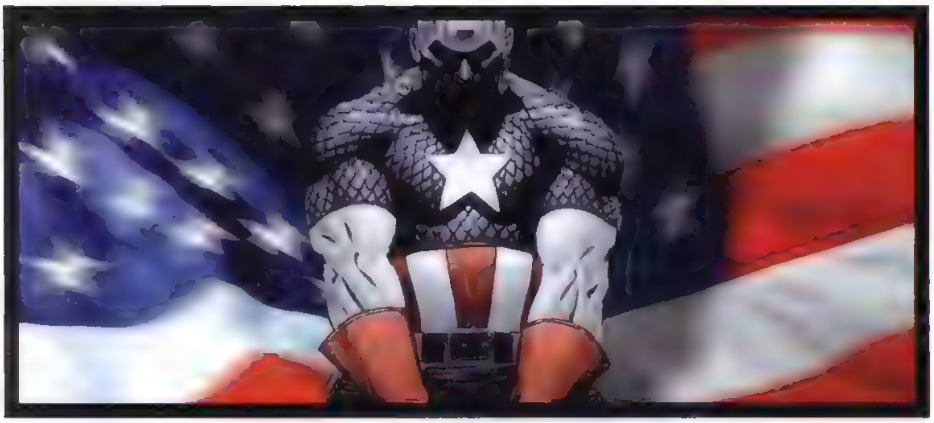
Another Dez launch – what we'd give for those transfers now!



Ah! Nostalgic wonder from Quality's comic *Warrior*. Ace.

COMING SOON!

Comic movies are big business these days, as *Iron Man 2* will no doubt prove. Join us as we highlight the best of the rest! By **Steve O'Brien**



The First Avenger: Captain America

EXPECTED: July 2011
DIRECTOR: Joe Johnston

What it's about: The origin story of Steve Rogers, aka Captain America! Expect the Red Skull in attendance and lots of B52s
Why we should be excited: With "about half the movie" set during World War 2, according to Marvel's Avi Arad, we should at least be getting a superhero movie with a distinct visual punch. Joe Johnston has some experience with pulp material, having helmed the underrated *The Rocketeer*. There's no casting news yet, but we can presume that early '00s favourite Brad Pitt is too far over the hill now. Let's just cross our fingers and toes that the role doesn't go to Zac Efron.
They say: "The biggest opportunity with Captain America is as a man 'out of time', coming back today and looking at our world through the eyes of someone who thought perfection was small-town America. Sixty years go by and who are we today? Are we any better?" *Avi Arad*

Thor

EXPECTED: May 2011
DIRECTOR: Kenneth Branagh

What it's about: The Norse god of thunder comes to the big screen
Why we should be excited: Branagh has described *Thor* as "a human story right in the centre of a big, epic scenario". Casting an unknown as Thor is risky (Chris Hemsworth's biggest gig so far was a short scene as Jim Kirk's dad in *Star Trek*), but Branagh has some marquee names backing him up, including Anthony Hopkins as Odin and Natalie Portman as Jane Foster
They say: "There are many Thors and many accounts of the stories across nearly 50 years of the comics. We look to raid from the best."
Kenneth Branagh

FAR LEFT: The mighty Thor, as rendered by Bryan Hitch in *The Ultimates*

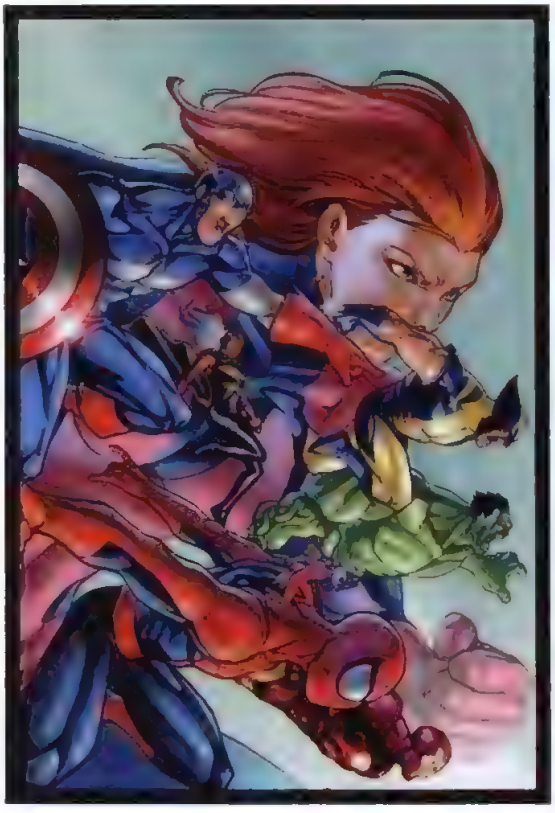
ABOVE: Captain America! But who will play him, hmm?

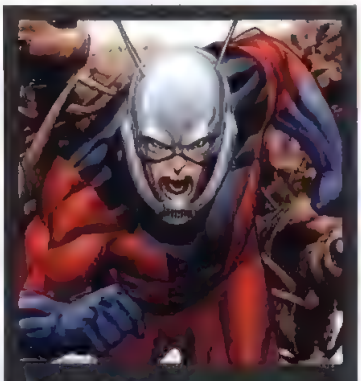
BELOW: The Avengers. Don't expect to see Wolverine in the film

The Avengers

EXPECTED: 4 May 2012
DIRECTOR: Unknown

What it's about: Hulk, Iron Man, Captain America and Thor team up with Samuel L. Jackson's Nick Fury as the Avengers.
Why we should be excited: As soon as Marvel established itself as a film studio, it was able to organise the build-up to the long-awaited *Avengers* movie. With *Iron Man 2*, *Thor* and *Captain America* readying the multiplex crowds for Marvel's A-list superteam, anticipation should be at fever pitch by the film's scheduled release in 2012. Jon Favreau is producing, but opted out of directing duties. Given that the movie is putting a whole gang of leading men on screen at once, whichever brave soul takes it on will have to deal with quite a few potentially warring egos. Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige confirmed to *Comic Heroes*' sister magazine *SFX* in January that the Incredible Hulk would definitely be making an appearance, but Edward Norton's participation isn't set in stone. While there's a possibility of *Spider-Man 3*-level character overload, it's a juicy prospect to finally see so many of Marvel's top superheroes rubbing shoulders with each other.
They say: "What's exciting to me about the *Avengers* movie is seeing those four characters together and interacting with each other. Anywhere from the first issue of *The Avengers* to *Civil War*, the dynamic between Steve Rogers and Tony Stark is awesome and fascinating. It brings out sides of the others that wouldn't be brought out in their own franchises." *Kevin Feige*





Ant-Man

EXPECTED: 2012?
DIRECTOR: Edgar Wright

What it's about: The story of goldfish-bowl-helmeted Ant-Man and his various alter egos.
Why we should be excited: Ant-Man is hardly in the top tier of Marvel's long list of superheroes, but with Edgar Wright in charge we're hoping for something approaching great. He's promised that his version, co-written with Joe Cornish of *Adam And Joe* mini fame, won't be a spoof but will be "more of a full-on action adventure sci-fi film but with a comedic element." In the comic world Ant-Man was a sometime member of the Avengers, but *Ant-Man* the movie isn't being planned to tie into the *Avengers* film. Rumours that Jamie Cullum has been earmarked are thankfully untrue.
They say: "It's certainly not a superhero spoof or pastiche and it isn't a sort of *Honey I Shrunk The Kids* endeavour at all."
Edgar Wright

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The Adventures Of Tintin: The Secret Of The Unicorn

EXPECTED: Dec 2011
DIRECTOR: Steven Spielberg

What it's about: Bequiffed reporter and his little dog solve mysteries around the world with a couple of twins and a bearded sea captain.
Why we should be excited: Is there any reason not to be? Firstly, this is a creative team-up between Spielberg and Peter Jackson (Spielberg's directing, Jackson's producing and they're swapping roles for part two), and secondly, it's pioneering some supposedly jaw-dropping motion-capture technology – *Polar Express* this apparently ain't. Jamie Bell took over from Thomas Sangster when the movie was put back, Simon Pegg and Nick Frost are reunited as the Thompson twins and Andy Serkis gets CGI-ed as Captain Haddock. Daniel Craig is on board as villainous pirate Red Rackham. Filming wrapped a year ago, so you'll be seeing three years' worth of CGI tinkering in December 2011.
They say: "There will be no cell phones, no TV sets, no modern cars. Just timeless Europe." *Steven Spielberg*

ABOVE LEFT: The Belgian boy reporter. Nice trousers.

ABOVE RIGHT: Is the *Spidey* reboot really a good idea?

BELOW: The *Green Lantern* movie is a risky proposition.

Spider-Man 4

EXPECTED: 2012
DIRECTOR: Marc Webb

What it's about: Relationships, high school and a bit of fighting.
Why we should be excited: Losing Raimi looked foolish on Sony's part, but hiring Marc Webb, who scored an impressive multiplex hit with his indie kid rom-com *500 Days Of Summer*, was a wise move. The *Hollywood Reporter* says that Webb is looking towards Brian Bendis and Mark Bagley's *Ultimate Spider-Man* for inspiration. Sony have promised a more Peter Parker-focused movie (ie a cheaper one), and one that takes him back to high school. We'd guess the Stan Lee cameo will still be happening though. If it's not, we're not going.
They say: "I'm here because there's an opportunity for ideas, stories and histories that will add a new dimension, and creative voice to *Spider-Man*." *Marc Webb*

Green Lantern

EXPECTED: June 2011
DIRECTOR: Martin Campbell

What it's about: Pilot Hal Jordan discovers an alien ring and becomes – drumroll – the Green Lantern!
Why we should be excited: Despite already being cast as Deadpool in *Wolverine*, Ryan Reynolds has been fingered to don the green as DC's decades-old hero, with Peter Sarsgaard as his nemesis Hector Hammond and Mark Strong as evil baddie Sinestro (what, Mark Strong *as a villain*?). With a budget of $150 million and *Casino Royale* helmer Martin Campbell in charge, it's clear Warners are planning big things for a character who's little known outside the comic fraternity. "It's more *Iron Man* than *Batman Begins*," Campbell said recently. Campbell has shown that he can produce character-driven actioners, so hopes are high.
They say: "I haven't done a superhero movie before and he's fascinating as a character, given that his powers are psychological. He's the only superhero to go to another planet, which is unusual." *Martin Campbell*

X-Men: First Class

EXPECTED: 2012
DIRECTOR: Bryan Singer

What it's about: The prequel to the original *X-Men*, as Beast, Jean Gray, Cyclops et al arrive at Professor X's School For Gifted Youngsters.
Why we should be excited: Neither of the Bryan Singer-less *X-Men* flicks have matched the first two, so it's great to see him back in the director's seat. Producer Lauren Shular Donner hopes it will kickstart a new *X-Men* franchise and, as last year's *Star Trek* proved, we don't mind seeing new faces on old characters if the product's good.
They say: "This is the formative years of Xavier and Magneto, and where their relationship took a wrong turn. There's a romantic element, and some mutants from *X-Men* will figure into the plot." *Bryan Singer*

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COMIC MOVIES IN 2010!

Jonah Hex

EXPECTED: 18 June 2010
DIRECTOR: Jimmy Hayward
STARRING: Josh Brolin, Megan Fox, John Malkovich

What it's about: A scarred bounty hunter, Jonah Hex, does battle with a Confederate Civil War veteran who's trying to restart the war. Based on the DC comic.

Why we should be excited: Despite Thomas Jane angling for the title role (even going so far as to send out a photo of himself as Hex, complete with battle scars. Oh, Tom...), the role went to the more marquee-friendly Josh Brolin, for which we should all be thankful. Megan Fox is on hand for pouting duties and John Malkovich is Quentin Turnball, the Confederate vet whose history with Hex goes back to when the bounty hunter caused the death of Turnball's son during the Civil War. The movie went for reshoots in January, which may be a cause for concern, especially as *Jonah Hex* is the first live action film for director Jimmy Hayward, who previously helmed *Horton Hears A Who*.

They say: "I was a huge fan of the comic book and I'm a huge Western fan. That's one of the things Josh and I connected on very early – our love of that whole genre and style."
Jimmy Hayward

Kick-Ass

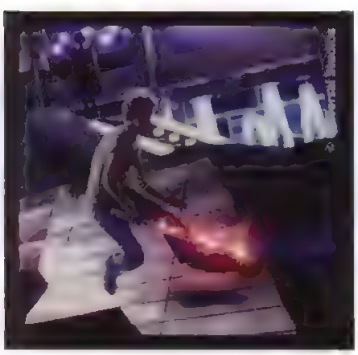
EXPECTED: 2 April
DIRECTOR: Matthew Vaughn
STARRING: Aaron Johnson, Christopher Mintz-Plasse, Nicolas Cage

What it's about: Regular Joe becomes makeshift superhero called Kick-Ass.
Why we should be excited: Based on Mark Millar's comic series, *Kick-Ass* has become the first indie superhero flick. Turn to page 40 for the inside skinny
They say: "Visually, I wanted to make it look like a sort of glossy American film, so what happens in the film is shocking, not the style. We've seen this type of movie before – but then you're like, 'Or maybe I haven't.' So I was just trying to make it very bright and colourful." *Matthew Vaughn*

Scott Pilgrim Vs The World

EXPECTED: 17 August 2010
DIRECTOR: Edgar Wright
STARRING: Michael Cera, Keiran Culkin, Mary Elizabeth Winstead

What it's about: Scott Pilgrim has met the girl of his dreams. Only now he has to fight off her seven evil exes before he can date her.
Why we should be excited: Even though he's only two films down, Edgar Wright has yet to deliver a clunker. The part of Scott Pilgrim, bassist in fictional garage rock band Sex Bob-Omb, seems a snug fit for the universally loved Michael Cera. Wright is also promising some explicit allusions to the film's 2D origins, so expect a movie that cuts its own distinctive swagger among 2010's comic book flicks.
They say: "It's a game changer for Edgar and the genre. It moves at the speed of light and carries more unadulterated joy than I've seen in recent cinema. It does what everyone our age has been dreaming about: it achieves the first all-encompassing film of the joystick generation. I'm in awe of the sheer control in the filmmaking. It feels like a *Matrix* for love and how willing we are to fight for it." *Jason Reitman*



Dead Of Night

EXPECTED: 2010
DIRECTOR: Kevin Munroe
STARRING: Brandon Routh, Peter Stormare, Taye Diggs

What it's about: A supernatural private eye called Dylan Dog seeks out monsters in Louisiana.
Why we should be excited: The makers of this film, which is based on Italian writer Tiziano Sciavi's comic *Dylan Dog*, have pissed off long-time fans by relocating the action from London to Louisiana. But then again, Louisiana has always been an atmospheric movie location, so maybe they ought to lighten up. It's good to see Brandon Routh, who was by far the best thing about *Superman Returns*, finally secure another leading role. He's described the film as a mixture of comedy, action, thriller and horror and suggests it'll be "*Ghostbusters* for this generation". We await the rubbish sequel, then.
They say: "At the core of Dylan's hard-boiled exterior is this glimmer of humanity. A man who has a moral compass through all the BS – I think Brandon possesses that effortlessly." *Kevin Munroe*

LEFT: The first official still from *Scott Pilgrim*

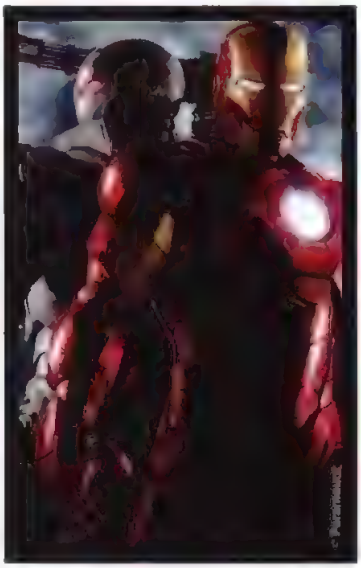
RIGHT: You can read all about *Iron Man 2* on page 22

BELOW: Brandon Routh returns from *Superman* in *Dead Of Night*. Nice monocle

Iron Man 2

EXPECTED: 7 May 2010
DIRECTOR: Jon Favreau
STARRING: Robert Downey Jr, Mickey Rourke, Don Cheadle

What it's about: Well, it's about Iron Man, isn't it? Few expected much from 2008's *Iron Man*, with washed-up Robert Downey Jr as its lead and the helmer of *Elf* as its director. But it gained the fourth biggest opening for any superhero movie ever, and hopes are therefore stratospherically high for this year's sequel
Why we should be excited: It's Iron Man! You can read more on page 22.
They say: "It's tough to keep [a superhero franchise] fresh and not do something that's derivative of something someone else has done. By taking a left turn at the end of the first film and making him a public figure, it opened it up to a whole lot of new possibilities. It goes beyond your standard secret identity/caped crusader model." *Jon Favreau*



The Losers

EXPECTED: 23 April 2010
DIRECTOR: Sylvain White
STARRING: Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Idris Elba, Zoe Saldana, Chris Evans

What it's about: A left-for-dead CIA team seek revenge on those who betrayed them.
Why we should be excited: Based on Andy Diggle and Jock's much-praised series for DC's Vertigo imprint, this looks like a hoot, full of smartass dialogue, loveable rogues and big action setpieces. It gets full marks for the line, "I'm the black MacGyver Blackgyver!" alone.
They Say: "When I read the screenplay, it struck me as a comedy disguised as an action film." *Sylvain White* CH

COMIC HEROES

EVENTS DIARY

What's going on, when and where!

Hi-Ex! 2010

WHEN IS IT: 27th – 28th March
VENUE: Eden Court, Inverness, Scotland
WEBSITE: www.hi-ex.co.uk

March 27 — **Who's going:** A crop of *2000 AD* vets will be in attendance, led by Alan Grant, Cam Kennedy and Dave Taylor. Another Brit comic institution, *The Beano*, is represented by Kev F Sutherland, Stevie White, Gary Northfield and Jasper Bark.

WonderCon 2010

WHEN IS IT: 2nd – 4th April
VENUE: Moscone Center South, San Francisco, California, USA
WEBSITE: www.comic-con.org/wc

April 2 — **Who's going:** WonderCon has lined up new DC head honcho Geoff Johns, Adam Hughes, comic scribe and filmmaker Kevin Smith, *Power Girl*'s Amanda Conner and Robert Kirkman, the man behind the brain-devouring zombies of *The Walking Dead*.

Bristol International Comic And Small Press Expo

WHEN IS IT: 22nd – 23rd May
VENUE: Ramada Bristol City Hotel and the Mercure Hotel, Bristol, UK
WEBSITE: www.fantasyevents.org/bristolcomicexpo

May 22 — Who's going: A host of Image Comics' best and brightest, plus the legends Chris Claremont and Pat Mills. Read more on page six.

London MCM Expo

WHEN IS IT: 29th – 30th May
VENUE: Excel, London, UK
WEBSITE: www.londonexpo.com

May 29 — **Who's going:** While this expo tends to be overshadowed by the cosplayers and TV stars, there are still plenty of treats. Confirmed guests include *Daredevil*'s Andy Diggle, horror fave Ben Templesmith and Alan Grant.

London Film And Comic Con

WHEN IS IT: 17th – 18th July
VENUE: Earl's Court 2, London, UK
WEBSITE: www.londonfilmandcomiccon.com

July 17 — **Who's going:** The confirmed comics guests so far are Bill Sienkiewicz and Greg Rucka. High-profile TV stars include Katee 'Starbuck' Sackhoff and... William Shatner. Sweeeeet. Fingers crossed he does 'Rocket Man'.

San Diego Comic-Con International

WHEN IS IT: 22nd – 25th July
VENUE: San Diego Convention Center, California, USA
WEBSITE: www.comic-con.org

July 22 — Who's going: The grand-daddy of all comic cons looks set to continue its reign at the top this year. The line up already includes new DC co-publisher Jim Lee, *Groo The Wanderer*'s Sergio Aragones, Chris Claremont, Brian Michael Bendis, Kurt Busiek and some chap called Stan Lee.

New York Comic Con

WHEN IS IT: 8th – 10th October
VENUE: Jacob K Javits Center, New York, USA
WEBSITE: www.newyorkcomiccon.com

Oct 8 — **Who's going:** The Keystone Guest Of Honour is none other than legendary comic artist John Romita Sr – the artist responsible for countless classics at Marvel since the '60s. John Romita Jr, the man set to become the new *Avengers* artist in May, is this year's second Keystone Guest alongside his illustrious dad.

British International Comics Show

WHEN IS IT: 16th – 17th October
VENUE: Thinktank, Birmingham, UK
WEBSITE: www.thecomicsshow.co.uk

Oct 16 — **Who's going:** No information yet on who'll be there, but last year's event saw Alan Davis, Howard Chaykin, Gary Leach and Bryan Talbot.

Wizard World

WHEN IS IT: 16th – 18th April
VENUE: Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, California, USA
WEBSITE: www.wizardworld.com

April 16 — **Who's going:** Wizard works its magic to summon together the likes of *BSG*'s Mary McDonnell and queen of *Dollhouse* Eliza Dushku. Comics-wise it's a little light, but the guest list includes Stan Lee, JM DeMatteis, and artists Bernard Chang of *Deadpool* and Bernie Wrightson, famed for his classic *Swamp Thing*.

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF HIGHLANDER & RESIDENT EVIL: EXTINCTION
THOMAS JANE VING RHAMES ELSA PATAKY
HARD TO LOVE
HARDER TO KILL
GIVE 'EM HELL MALONE
A FILM BY RUSSELL MULCAHY
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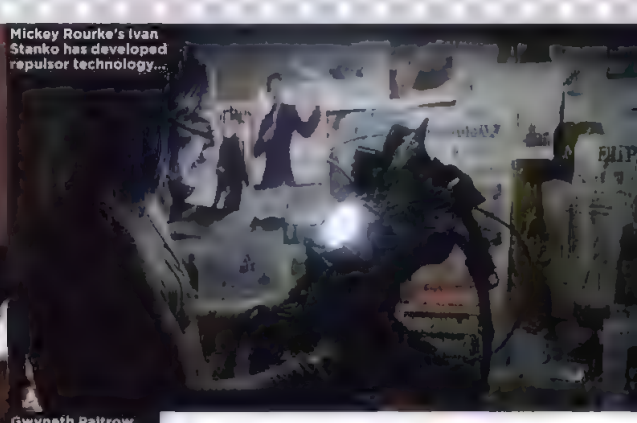
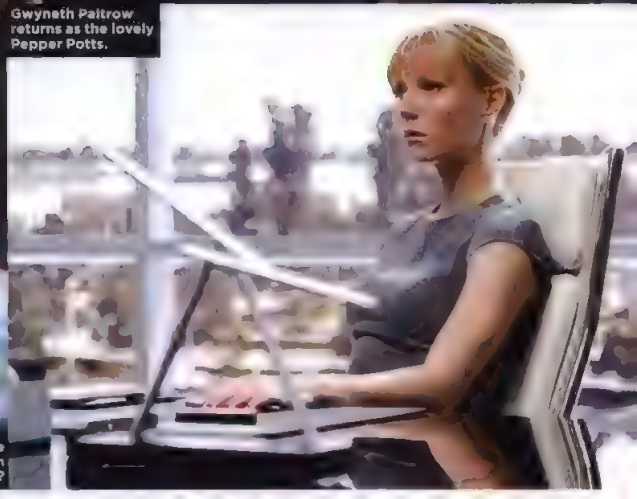
MAJOR MARVEL MOVIE!
In cinemas 30 April!
REINFORCED
ARMOR

Iron Man's triumphant return to the big screen is imminent – **Joseph McCabe** talked to the man behind the armour, **Robert Downey Jr**, and director **Jon Favreau** about all things shellhead...

Has Tony Stark gone into town planning in *Iron Man 2*?



Mickey Rourke's Ivan Stanko has developed repulsor technology...



Gwyneth Paltrow returns as the lovely Pepper Potts.

Robert Downey Jr is the kind of guy we find frustrating. As journos, we're forever wary of indulging in that hoariest of clichés – comparing an actor to the role he plays on screen. Most of the time it's an easy pitfall to avoid; flesh and blood can rarely approach the larger-than-life personas that dominate big-budget Hollywood movies. It's even easier when an actor plays something as large as a super-powered champion. But with Downey, our resistance is fractured. Not so much because he plays Iron Man, Marvel Comics' armored Avenger, who featured in director Jon Favreau's surprise summertime 2008 hit, but because Downey also plays the man inside the armour, billionaire industrialist Tony Stark.

After chatting with Downey for just a few minutes, it's plain to see why Favreau was so eager to cast him in the role, why audiences devoured the film and why so many are awaiting his return in *Iron Man 2*. It's what Downey holds in common with Stark – brash wit, laser-beam intellect, roguish charisma and a mature sex appeal that, when fused together, powered the heart of the hit film and enraptured newbies and longtime comic fans alike.

Of course, the fact that Downey, like his character, has conquered his personal demons to become one of the most successful professionals in »

> "I have a stamp that I put on the bricks that I make that go into building something. If they crack, my name's on them, so it's on me"
>
> Robert Downey Jr

BELOW: *Director Jon Favreau listens to his very nattily-dressed leading men*

Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow adds some saucy intrigue.

Ivan Stanko's electrified whips cause a bit of grief...

> "It's a little nerve-wracking, but on the one hand, not a lot's expected once you have an established franchise"
>
> Jon Favreau

his field adds more than a little to the overall mystique.

But after decades in the movie business, Downey's savvy enough to downplay the commonalities, as well as the extent to which his celebrity status informs his portrayal of a Tony Stark who, in *Iron Man 2*, has shared his secret with the world.

"I mean, I don't know if this is some peculiar mental twist I have," Downey tells *Comic Heroes* when we sit down to chat about the new film with him and Favreau, "but I don't think of it that way. Which isn't to say that I don't think of the truth as what it is."

Wheels visibly turning in his head, Downey adds, "The best place for me to be, occupying my psyche, is a worker among workers. There are all these peripheral things that go on. But at the end of the day, I'm someone who's responsible for... Well, I have a stamp that I put on the bricks that I make that go into building something. If they crack, my name's on them, so it's on me."

BELOW: Iron Man armour not exciting enough for you? Then why not indulge in some Formula 1 racing?

"Let me put it this way," he continues, "after *Iron Man* came out, all the repressed narcissistic personality disorder proclivities I may have had came out to me like, 'Hi, look!' And I quickly threw a 300,000-square-foot butterfly net on them. But it's tricky."

So just how does one go about building a sequel to a film as remarkably popular and successful as the first *Iron Man*?

"I think that by getting over the origin-story anxiety," says Downey. "It's hard to tell a cooler story than an origin story. But the nice thing was that the more we looked and the more we talked, the more we really kind of studied each other's eyes and hearts and said, 'How much of our asses can we work off to meet it or beat it?'"

"It's a little nerve-wracking," adds Favreau. "But, on the one hand, not a lot's expected once you have an established franchise. You know that the world knows about you."

According to both men, one way to match the first film's success is by again focusing as much on the relationships in Tony Stark's life as on Iron Man's high-flying heroics – chief among them Stark's simmering romance with secretary Pepper Potts (played by Gwyneth Paltrow). We ask Downey whether the introduction of Scarlett Johansson's sultry Russian spy Natasha Romanoff (aka the Black Widow) in *Iron Man 2* creates a love triangle for the characters

STARK CONTRASTS

"Well, I don't see how it couldn't," he says. "But to us, a love triangle is a

Stark has a Whiplash-related accident at the races. Oops.

Paul Bettany provides the voice of Jarvis, Stark's digital servant.

device and a love triangle is convenient So I'd be surprised if it winds up being what anyone expects."

And where is Stark's relationship with his best friend Colonel James Rhodes (played by Don Cheadle, replacing the first film's Terrence Howard) heading, now that the industrialist is no longer supplying America's armed forces with weapons?

"Well, we see that Tony is surprised that his friend shows up at a Senate hearing in which they're trying to blast him into handing over his property – which they consider to be *their* property. It's not uncommon for someone to be put between two entities that way. So I think that if there's no conflict between Tony and Rhodey at a certain point in the film, there's no drama... And, by the way, the way we resolve that conflict I guarantee you couldn't guess in your wildest estimations right now because it's so silly and perfect and dysfunctional. The real, new-deal Holyfield in this movie is Don playing Rhodey as War Machine, and it's gonna be really cool. But that, in and of itself, doesn't mean anything. It's 'How does it interact with Tony and Iron Man and what does that mean and how interesting and real can we make it?'"

What's it like working with a new actor in the role of Rhodey?

"They just have a different presence," says Favreau. "It's really like being the coach of a sports team. Sometimes you switch players in positions and you have to work your offence around the strengths of that person. In this case, Don has a different kind of screen presence. He carries his power differently. But it was about

GOD OF WAR

ACTOR DON CHEADLE ON SUITING UP AS WAR MACHINE...

COMIC HEROES: A lot of actors play characters taking their characters from the page to the screen, but you're pulling double duty in that you're actually playing a character previously played by another actor.

DON CHEADLE: I don't know how you try to play [illegible] I don't know how you try to play [illegible] Well, I have to respect what [illegible] and I have to try and make sure that everybody [illegible] Somebody's gonna [illegible] more than anything I'd [illegible] what the part [illegible]

CH: Did you get to [illegible] Mickey Rourke during [illegible]

DC: Oh yeah, I had a real [illegible]

CH: Was it fun [illegible]

DC: I wouldn't [illegible] behind the monitor and [illegible]

CH: [illegible] and Rhodey in the film?

DC: The second one [illegible] Tony [illegible] and [illegible] and Tony [illegible] military [illegible] together [illegible] dynamic [illegible]

CH: [illegible]

DC: [illegible] X-Men and [illegible]

Outing himself as Iron Man has consequences for Tony Stark.

The aftermath of Whiplash's attack at the racetrack.

LEFT: Stark's continually tinkering with his Iron Man tech - what surprises are in store for us?

exploring the power of that character. Terrence, he uses a different set of clubs. It's terrible, I'm mixing so many metaphors... But as a director, much like a coach, these are your resources and you want to win the game with who you have. So not a lot of time was spent looking back. I'd love to work with Terrence again. I think he's very, very talented, and I think it would have been a different movie with him, but it could have been a good movie as well."

This time around, says Downey, his collaboration with Jon Favreau has been even smoother.

"It's pretty fluid," he says, "I'm so sensitive too, because I feel like Jon and I should be having this holy communion together. So if he's like Twittering or paying attention to any of the other cast members, I have this inordinately childish reaction.

"But I've grown up a little bit. And the truth is, I'm really strong about coming in and saying, 'There's something behind that wall. Knock it down and there'll be gold there,' or 'It seems like the scene wants to flow kind of in a circle this way and wind up with us right back where we started, except when we get back where we started everything's different.' I know this sounds weird, but I have equations in my head and those equations apply to where people should be and what the frequency of the interaction is and stuff like that, and the words and the props and the dialogue kind of come in later."

> "It's hard to tell a cooler story than an origin story"
> Robert Downey Jr

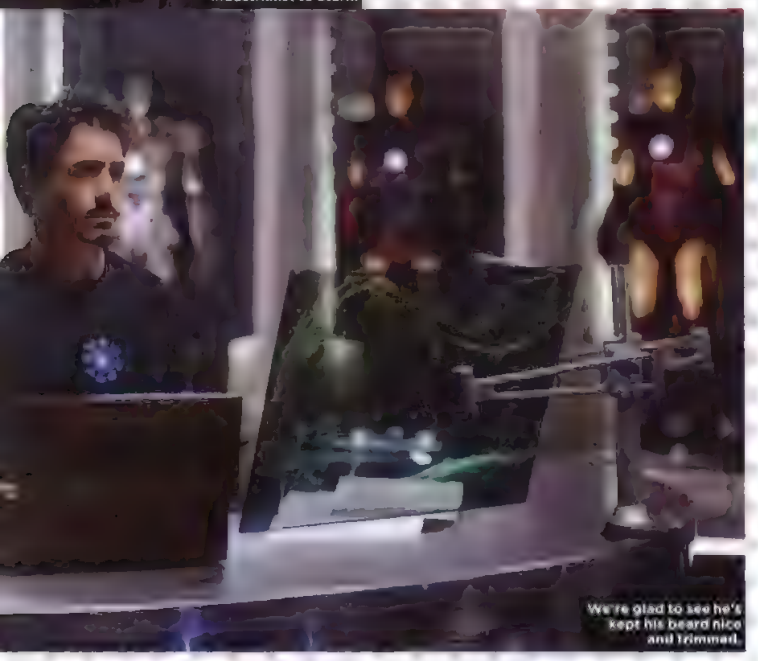
FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Iron Man 2's dialogue – like that of the first film – was, in part, improvised by Downey and Favreau. However, the film's script comes from a newcomer to the franchise, screenwriter Justin Theroux, whose screenplay for 2008's *Tropic Thunder* helped to earn Downey an Oscar nomination

"Obviously I approved of his work in *Tropic Thunder*, just a little," laughs the actor. "But the thing is, I think once you're past a certain point – and this is a loosely serious term – but in mastery or serious apprenticeship of something, you pass a certain point and you can never arrive on the day with what you

Sam Rockwell stars as Justin Hammer, a rival industrialist to Stark.

> "A love triangle is convenient. So I would be surprised if it winds up being what anyone would expect"
> Robert Downey Jr


We're glad to see he's kept his beard nice and trimmed.

need. If you know too much then you know that there's something else that wants to happen, or there's another take on the scene that should be explored, and it's crazy-making for people who are like, 'So these were my sides from last night, and now you're telling me that they're gone, and we're working on it? We're halfway through the day. Will that 'working on it' be done before the day is over?'"

"You're like, 'Yup. We haven't gotten fucked once yet! Except that time when we did '"

We ask Favreau if he felt a need to cap Stark's story in *Iron Man 2*, in order to let a new story be told – that of his much-anticipated union with Thor and Captain America in *The Avengers*.

"I think you have to have a beginning, middle and end to a story," the director tells us. "Unless you're dealing with a trilogy like *The Lord of the Rings*, where it's all about setting the table for the next one. But I always feel, 'Really?!' I get lost with a lot of these movies and sequels. I don't remember, even with those I like. I look at my wife – she's like, 'Do you know what's going on?' I'm like, 'I don't know They're clapping, so it must be good

"To me, the best version is... in one film, Indiana Jones shoots the guy with the sword and in the next he doesn't have a gun. I don't want to have to remember more than the fact that he shot a dude with a sword; I don't want to remember the intricacies. I don't want to know who is whose dad. I'm an old man, I don't care and my kid's too young to remember. So you want to make it user friendly, but you want who the characters are to inform them, and their journey emotionally should definitely inform them."

Whether or not *Iron Man 2* has an ending, it's easy to wonder if it isn't Favreau's farewell to the character, as he's announced he won't be returning to the director's chair for *The Avengers*.

"It's hard," he says, a bittersweet note in his voice. "It's always hard. Sometimes it's better, but that's letting go... There's a lot of people collaborating on *Iron Man*, but I know at the end of the day the buck stops here. It's fun, but there's a lot of pressure. But I enjoy it. It's even interesting watching *The Incredible Hulk*, where there's a scene with Tony Stark – I wasn't involved in that, so that was strange." CH

A STUDY IN SCARLETT

THE SEX CRAZED TEEN OF COMIC HEROES HOW SHE SLIPPED ON THE BLACK WIDOW'S SPANDEX...

[illegible] What was it like working with the cast of a blockbuster movie?

SCARLETT JOHANNSON: [illegible] kind of geeked out... I mean, I was a huge fan of the first one. It was kind of overwhelming, I'm not [illegible] the cast themselves are unbelievable, they're funny. And they really outdid themselves this time. The production design is incredible. I was [illegible] that I always wanted when I was a kid and I played actor. When I was walking through the set, you sort of have the feeling that you're in the middle of a movie. [illegible] maybe that sounds crazy, but I certainly felt that [illegible] been through the film making more than [illegible] and certainly this story is a bit darker. I think it's a sort of a [illegible] natural leaning to it. Every time we came to set and [illegible] I was pretty [illegible]

CH: Did you get to see how the [illegible] Robert and Gwyneth had to [illegible] Iron Man?

SJ: My character is a very seductive woman, and that can certainly lead to some sort of funny and steamy and uncomfortable moments in all of that. But the set is [illegible] very funny. I mean, obviously Sam and Robert are hilarious, and everybody's just improvising a lot of the time and trying to one-up each other. There's a lot of room for [illegible] and that's [illegible] captured in the film. So the character does find herself in some humorous situations, I suppose, but not in the same way that Pepper Potts and Tony Stark have them [illegible]

CH: [illegible] Have you had a chance to see the [illegible] yet?

SJ: [Laughs] I've never been so close with a stunt team as I was with this [illegible] I mean, I was literally on [illegible] practically lived with them. And I was in incredible hands. But it's a lot of work, and a lot of blood, sweat and tears. There are days I wish you could [illegible] and say, I can't do it, my body hurts so bad." I started training six months before shooting and continued to train the whole time. There's a lot of putting your body through the mill, but it was a lot [illegible] I wouldn't have it any other way.

IRON MAN

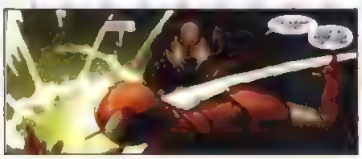
THE TEN ESSENTIAL STORIES

When **Jon Favreau** brought **Tony Stark** to the big screen in 2008, he built on foundations that were originally laid in **1963's *Tales Of Suspense* #39**, which sported Iron Man's first appearance. The release of this year's sequel means renewed interest in *Iron Man* comics – but if you haven't picked one up before, it can be difficult to know where to start. Luckily, we're on hand with a list of ten essential *Iron Man* stories spanning almost five decades of comic history. **By James Hunt**

DEMON IN A BOTTLE

***Iron Man: Demon In A Bottle* TPB (*Iron Man* v1 #120-#128)**

Despite his damaged heart, Iron Man never quite lived up to Stan Lee's innovative 'flawed hero' formula – until David Michelinie and Bob Layton struck upon the idea for 'Demon In A Bottle'. When Stark's playboy lifestyle finally catches up with him, it leads to an alcohol-fuelled fall from grace from which he can never truly recover. The story transformed Stark into a complex, sympathetic figure and still informs the character over 30 years on.



FIVE NIGHTMARES

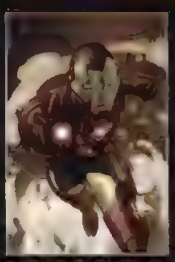
***Invincible Iron Man: Five Nightmares* TPB (*Invincible Iron Man* #1-#6)**

Launching a new *Iron Man* series, Matt Fraction provides a de facto 'sequel' to the first movie as Stark finds himself facing off against Ezekiel Stane, the son of late business rival Obadiah. The teenage Stane is younger, faster and perhaps even smarter than Stark, but worst of all, he's built his own Starktech-based armour, which he plans to use to get revenge on Iron Man. Can age and experience trump youth and enthusiasm? Perhaps – but not without a terrible cost.

CIVIL WAR

EXTREMIS

***Iron Man: Extremis* TPB (*Iron Man* v3 #1-#6)**



Over the years, Tony Stark has gone from being a simple inventor to a 'futurist' – so it was only natural for Warren Ellis, comicdom's most prominent future-fetishist, to put his own spin on the character. Ellis sent Stark back to his Howard Hughes-inspired roots, while collaborating artist Adi Granov went on to design the movie version of the Iron Man suit. The story itself is a new spin on the classic origin, as Stark once again turns to technology to save his life – but following his techno-organic 'upgrades', is he still the same man he was before?

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WORLD'S MOST WANTED

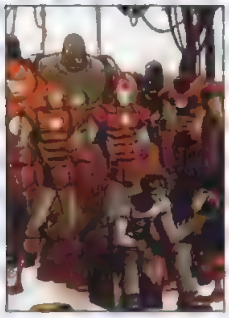
***Invincible Iron Man: World's Most Wanted* v1 and v2 TPBs (*Invincible Iron Man* #8-#19)**

The worst has happened. Stark's position as head of the international espionage organisation, SHIELD, has been usurped by Norman Osborn – also known as the villainous Green Goblin. With the secret identities of all registered superheroes now at risk, Stark conceals the information in his own brain and flees while a group of allies – including his trusted assistant Pepper Potts, piloting a custom 'Iron Woman' suit – help him evade Osborn's considerable reach. With his mind failing, Stark risks his life to atone for his past arrogance – but even the best case scenario ends in his death.

THE BEST DEFENSE

***Iron Man* v3 #73-#78 (currently uncollected)**

Having been recently unmasked as Iron Man, Stark finds himself drawn into a political scuffle when an unscrupulous senator uses unpatented Iron Man designs in military weapons. With his identity public, Stark is unable to simply take back his technology as he once did, and so begins a game of subterfuge and political wrangling in which he attempts to become Secretary Of Defense and regain control of his inventions – but how will America feel about having a superhero in control of its military?



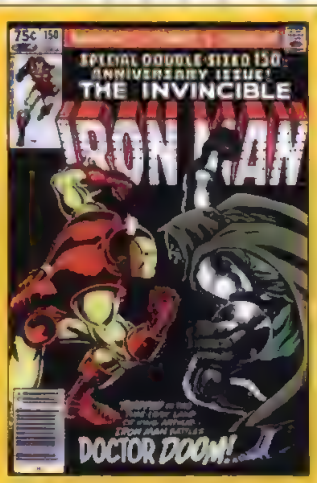
ARMOR WARS

***Iron Man: Armor Wars* TPB (*Iron Man* v1 #225-#231)**

In the first story to 'out' him as Marvel's premier control freak, Stark discovers that his technology is being stolen from those who have licensed it legitimately and then used by supervillains. Ever the brat, Stark decides to simply gather up his toys and take them home, with devastating consequences for anyone using his inventions. His noble, if misguided actions set the precedent for Stark's fiercely personal sense of responsibility that persists to this day.

DOOMQUEST

***Iron Man: Doomquest* HC (*Iron Man* v1 #149-#150, #249-#250)**



Doctor Doom may be best remembered as a *Fantastic Four* villain, but the arrogant, armoured genius is also a dark reflection of Tony Stark. When a fierce battle sees the two thrown back in time to Camelot, they find themselves on opposing sides of King Arthur's battle with sorceress Morgan Le Fay. Overcoming their differences, Stark and Doom must work together to help science defeat magic and return home. This swashbuckling adventure is a classic, too eccentric for the big screen, but perfectly acceptable on the page.

THE ORIGIN OF IRON MAN

***Marvel Masterworks: Iron Man* #[illegible] (*Tales Of Suspense* #39-#46)**

In the early '60s, writer-editor Stan Lee, artist Larry Lieber, Don Heck and Jack Kirby co-created Iron Man, a [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

YOU ARE THE HERO

Iron Man's everywhere – in comics, movies and now games. **Jes Bickham** talks to the writer of Sega's *Iron Man 2*, Matt Fraction...

Here's Matt Fraction, wearing a tie just for *Comic Heroes*. Maybe.

"I'VE SAID THIS BEFORE, BUT IT'S THE ONLY SUPERHERO MOVIE WHERE YOU'RE AS EXCITED TO SEE TONY STARK AS YOU ARE TO SEE IRON MAN" MATT FRACTION

Games based on films are nothing new, and they're notoriously difficult to get right. Tied to a tight production schedule and the necessity to hit shelves at the same time as their parent film is released, all too often they seem like little more than cheap cash-ins.

Sega's *Iron Man 2* looks to be an exception. It builds on the promise of its predecessor – 2008's *Iron Man* – spectacularly. You're able to play as both Iron Man and his new partner in crime War Machine, and the destructive potential in the game is giddying. With massive amounts of ordnance at your disposal and complete freedom of movement as you zip around the skies, this really makes you feel like an armour-clad superhero. Throw in upgradeable weapons and a variety of different fighting styles, and you've got something that does its level best to put you in the hard, metallic shoes of a certain Tony Stark.

It's also surprising in that it offers an all-new storyline – one that doesn't simply parrot the movie – and that it's been co-written by Eisner Award-winner Matt Fraction (author of *The Invincible Iron Man* and *Casanova*, among other comics). On a very cold day at Marvel's New York HQ, we spoke to him about his involvement in the game.

***COMIC HEROES:* Did writing for *Iron Man 2* require you to use a different approach to writing comics?**

MATT FRACTION: It's more akin to film or animation, but only up to a point; you just get to set up a problem, and then ultimately you have to hand it over to the gamer to solve it. I get to make the complication, but not the resolution! You have to solve it yourself or loop back around to the beginning again. So it's a very algebraic form of storytelling, in terms of what happens and how you tell the story.

***CH:* So in terms of the game's development, what came first – the story or the gameplay?**

MF: Pieces of the story were already in place. By the time I came in there was a broad shape, and I gave notes on it – there was a team of writers involved, so I wasn't the only guy. But my notes were all about Tony and who he was, and that nobody else can do what he can do. You know, giving general narrative notes to guys who are games designers and largely not writers. They got to teach me a lot about games development, and I got to say "That doesn't make sense," and nobody had hurt feelings!

***CH:* With people like Warren Ellis, Antony Johnston and yourself writing for games, is this a sign that developers want their in-game narratives to be taken more seriously?**

MF: I can't speak for others here – I'm not a battle-hardened veteran at this – but it depends on how soon the writer gets in the room. You know, do you just want to put Warren Ellis's name on the front of the box, or do you really want him to work the idea and the story? You need someone not just familiar with gameplay, but also narrative to tell a story that resonates on a human level. Otherwise it's just *Transformers 2*! You know, it's like, 'Oh, I see something else is exploding now.' There needs to be emotional connective tissue, to keep the player hooked even when their thumb's off the button. To get someone to watch a game, that's a huge thing.

***CH:* What involvement have you had with the movie?**

MF: I was out there for like a week working on *Iron Man 2*, but it was my book [*Invincible Iron Man*] that got me out there. It resonated tonally, I guess. But, you now, I just wrote the book I wanted to read... and I was rejoicing in the casting, because it spoke volumes about the movie they were making. You don't get those guys if you're making *Transformers 2*! I've said this before, but it's the only superhero movie where you're as excited to see Tony Stark as you are to see Iron Man. Nobody wants to see a Bruce Wayne movie, you know? You could totally make a Tony Stark movie and people would go to see it. It'd be terrific. We've never had a character like that on the big screen.

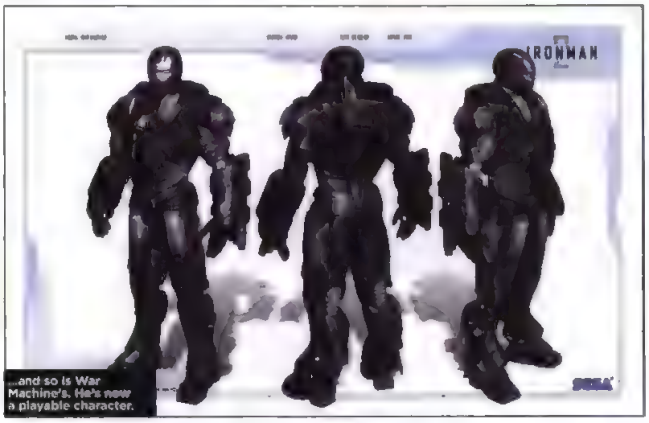
***CH:* Has writing for *Iron Man 2* fired an interest in writing for videogames? Is it something you'd like to explore further?**

MF: Oh yeah, I'd love to get in the room sooner, you know? Much like Tony Stark when he revealed he was Iron Man, I'm on the bottom rung of a whole new ladder. The opportunities are huge; you can really tear things up and do amazing stuff that hasn't been explored before. Pretty soon you'll be able to pick everything up and open every door. The nature of a game's life cycle has never accommodated the writer, really... I suspect that the narrative rarely comes first. There are exceptions to the rule, of course – I'm no grand authority – but to be involved from day one... I don't think there's really been a game like that before.

Has gaming had its *Citizen Kane* yet? Its *Birth Of A Nation*? I guess you could argue that it has – that the grammar has been established – but it all moves so quickly. It's like hip-hop; it has no sense of its own history. It's all about new tech and progress and process... You know, there's an ironic attachment to old games, but much like hip-hop, there's no consideration for its own past. It just moves forward like a rocket. It's a crazy world!

■ ***Iron Man 2*** **is out in April on the Nintendo DS, PSP, PS3, Wii and Xbox 360 formats, published by Sega.**

Iron Man's in-game model is highly detailed stuff...



...and so is War Machine's. He's now a playable character.

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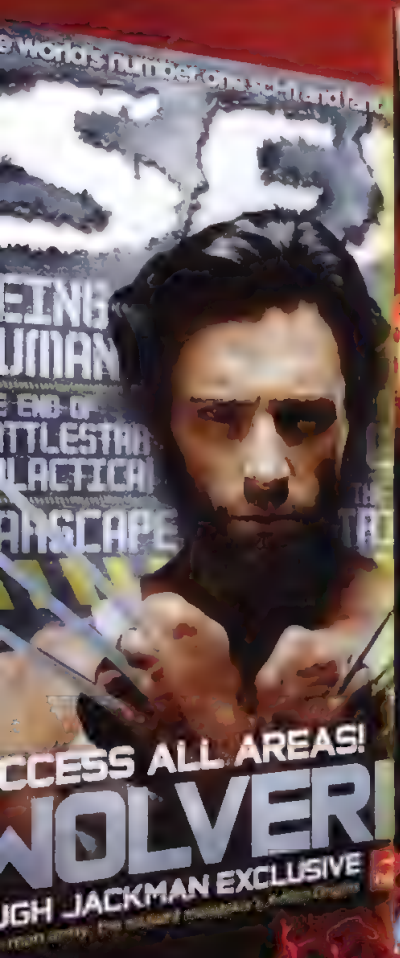

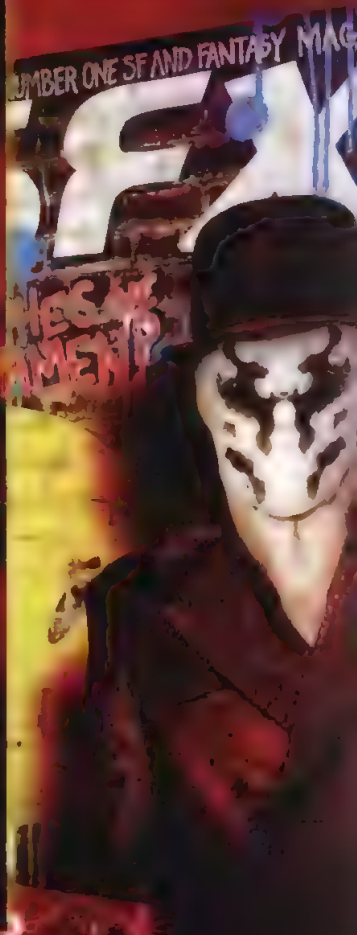

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SPECIAL COMIC PREVIEW!

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No! It's *Superman: Secret Origin*!

Is there a more iconic superhero than Superman, the daddy of them all? Sure, Batman's cooler (and has a butler), Wonder Woman's got an invisible plane and Green Lantern's got a really funky ring, but Superman's the finest there is. Truly honourable, with the most powerful abilities of anyone out there, he embodies all that's best about us, despite being an alien – he's a truly aspirational figure and a reflection of our noblest qualities.

And so it's with great pleasure that we present five splendid pages of Geoff Johns's *Superman: Secret Origin* number five, out to buy on 31 March, with art by the incomparable Gary Frank, courtesy of the lovely folks at DC Comics. It's a six-issue take on Superman's early years, told from the perspective of Clark Kent, Superman's alter-ego. According to writer Johns, it's "his history of self-discovery and the world's story of meeting Superman." Enjoy! And be sure to come back next issue for more comic preview action...

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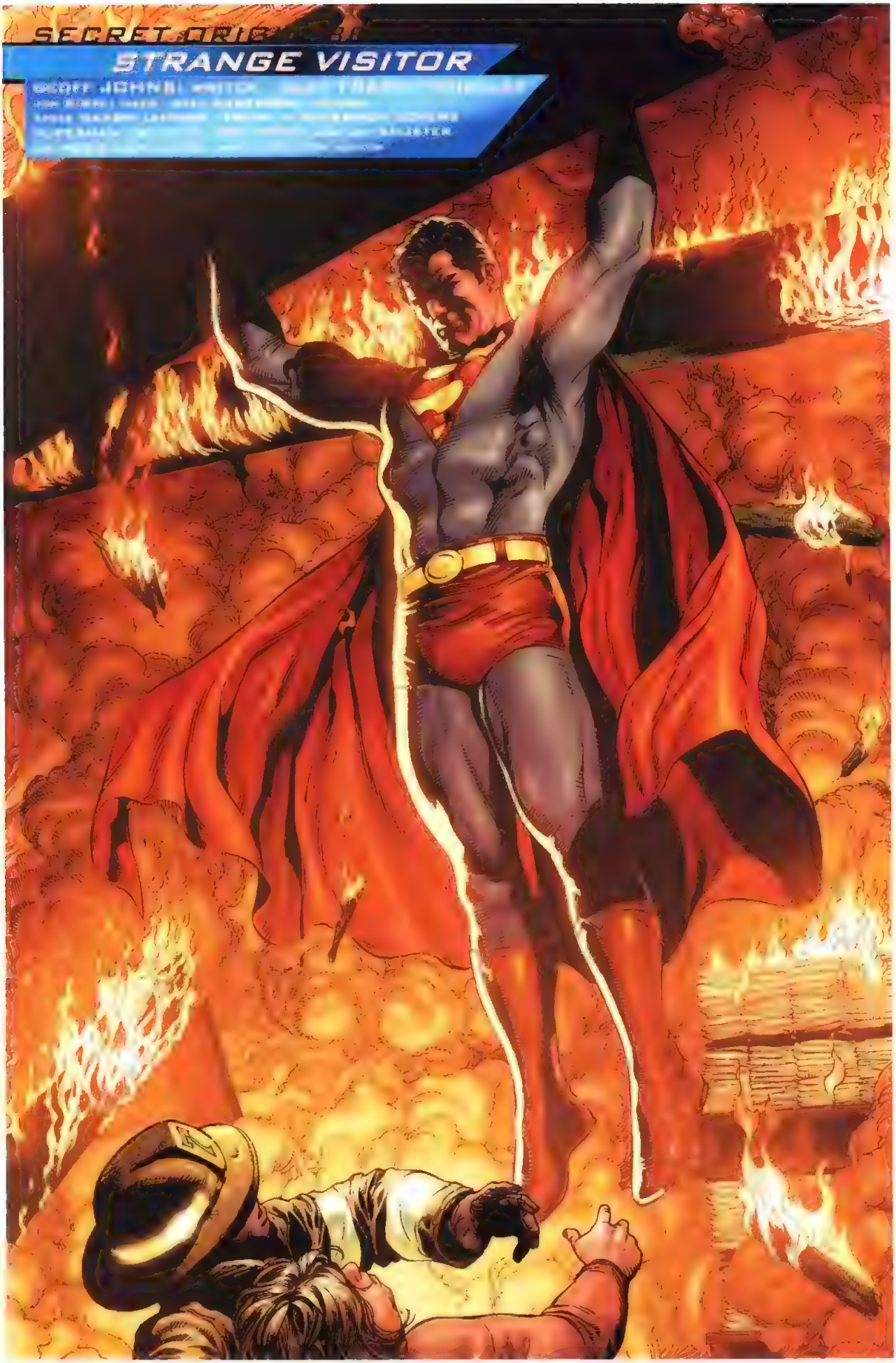
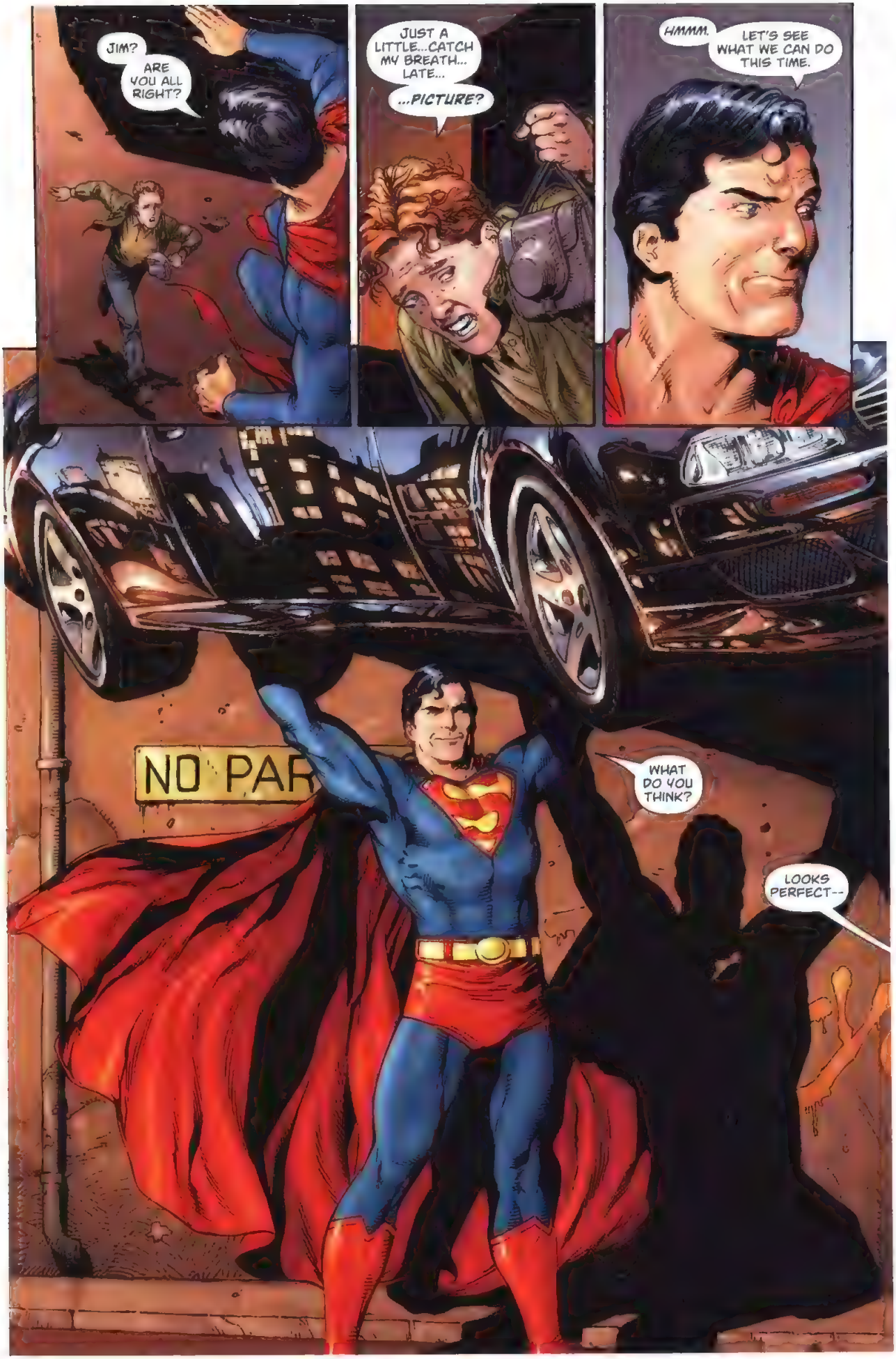
METROPOLIS.
:KUFF: :KUFF:
YOU'RE GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT. JUST STAY WITH ME.
I'M GOING TO GET YOU OUT OF--
KRRRRK KKSHH

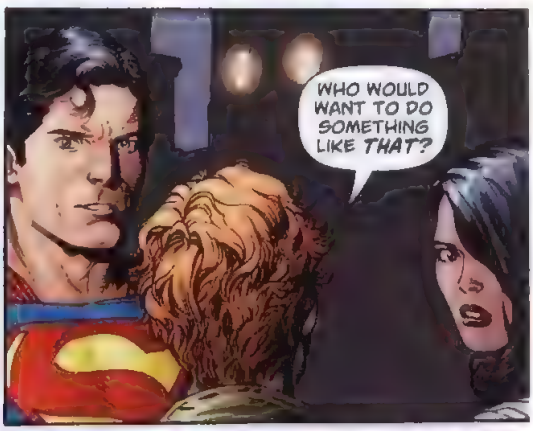

SECRET ORIGINS
STRANGE VISITOR

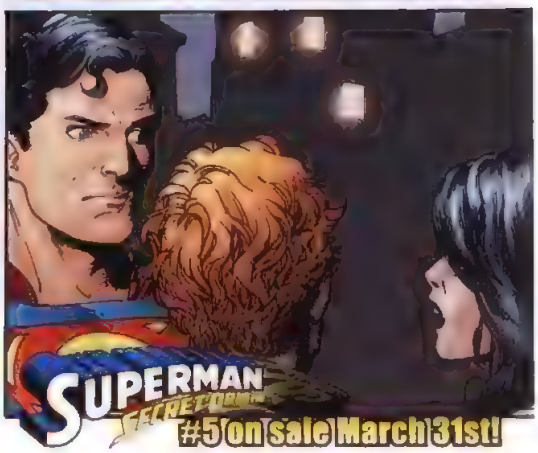
WATCH OUT!
HE SAVED US ALL.
BUT WHY?
GET A PICTURE!
HE'S MOVING TOO FAST!
SUPERMAN!


JIM?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
JUST A LITTLE...CATCH MY BREATH... LATE...
...PICTURE?
HMMM.
LET'S SEE WHAT WE CAN DO THIS TIME.
NO PAR
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
LOOKS PERFECT--

--FROM WHERE I'M STANDING.
NICE SHOT, KID.
FWAAISH
MISS LANE. IT'S NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
YEAH.
IT'S FUNNY HOW WE KEEP MEETING LIKE THIS, SUPERMAN.
YOU MEAN AT EVERY DISASTER, ROBBERY AND ACCIDENT IN METROPOLIS?

THAT FIRE BACK THERE WASN'T AN ACCIDENT, JIMMY.
YOU'RE RIGHT. MY MICROSCOPIC VISION DETECTED TRACES OF GASOLINE ACROSS THE LOADING BAY.
HOW DID YOU--?
KNOW THE FIRE AT ONE OF THE DAILY PLANET'S NATIONAL DISTRIBUTION CENTERS WAS DELIBERATE?
I WASN'T BORN YESTERDAY.


WHO WOULD WANT TO DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT?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MAIN IMAGE: Chloe Moretz as pre-teen killing machine Hit Girl.

***Kick-Ass* is almost here! Joel Meadows talks to writer Jane Goldman about putting a gangly teenage superhero onto the big screen...**

Feeling SUPER

Jane Goldman is a screenwriter who's become increasingly associated with comics and genre films. In fact, she's already worked with *Kick-Ass* director Matthew Vaughn on adapting Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess's *Stardust* illustrated novel for the big screen back in 2007. So it doesn't come as a huge surprise to see Goldman teaming up with the director again. She's been involved with *Kick-Ass* the movie since the beginning, as she reveals to *Comic Heroes*.

"Mark Millar was at the stage where he'd just had the idea, started putting the comic together and was getting excited about it," she remembers. "He knew that I'd been working with Matthew Vaughn at that point. I'd known Mark for a while and I put him in touch with Matthew. The two of them got talking and Matthew was equally excited. So that was how it began. He decided that this would be his next project to direct, and so it went from there."

Dave Lizewski is Kick-Ass. He's very... green.

> **"MARK WAS UNBELIEVABLY COOL ABOUT IT"**
> JANE GOLDMAN

With *Kick-Ass* not being made by a Hollywood studio, the experience was quite a contrast to *Stardust*.

"It's a very different series, but the process of working on it at script stage was very similar, apart from the fact that *Stardust* was the first project I'd »

Aaron Johnson (centre) plays Dave.

worked on with Matthew. So we were very much in the groove by this time. The main difference was when we came to shoot it, because *Stardust* was a studio film whereas this was an independent production, so that makes it quite a different experience."

TIME TO ADAPT

And that wasn't the only thing that differentiated *Kick-Ass* from the adaptation of Gaiman and Vess's novel.

"I suppose the other thing that was different was that a volume of comics or a graphic novel is much more movie-shaped than a novel, which isn't shaped like a movie at all. When you're adapting a novel, especially one that's got a huge fanbase, there's all that pressure because you know you're going to have to cut out something that someone somewhere loves, whereas a graphic novel's much shorter and you don't have to make so many brutal cuts. Also, *Stardust* had been around for a while whereas this was a brand new thing, so we hoped that fans of the comic would be more forgiving because they'd been introduced to the film and the comic at approximately the same time."

"THIS WAS AN INDEPENDENT, WHICH MAKES IT QUITE A DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE" JANE GOLDMAN

In fact, *Kick-Ass* was unusual because the film was made before the first arc of the comic had even been completed. But this didn't throw up any particular problems for Goldman.

"Mark was unbelievably cool about it and had essentially said to us that as long as we didn't kill anyone he wanted to be alive at the end of the comic, we could take liberties and he'd be completely supportive. As it was, I don't think we took any liberties. But there were some editorial decisions that Matthew made early on, all of which he ran past Mark, and he was very happy with them."

CASTING CALL

Even though she was the film's screenwriter, Goldman worked closely with Vaughn to fashion the script.

"With Matthew as the director on the project, he had a vision for the film and the way he wanted to tell the story. So at the outset, he sat down and came up with a structure. A structure can change as you go along, but you can use that as the foundation for a project. So then I'd do a draft and we'd discuss things. After that, I'd send him stuff with reference to adding material and putting ideas in. It was a constant process of communication between myself and Matthew."

She was also involved in the process of picking actors to bring her script to life on screen – something she seems happy to have been involved with.

"Well, I'm a co-producer on the film, but the final decision is always

BELOW: Jane Goldman on the set of *Kick-Ass*. Director Matthew Vaughn

Q&A

AARON JOHNSON

(DAVE LIZEWSKI/KICK-ASS)

By Nick Setchfield

COMIC HEROES: **What was it that appealed to you about *Kick-Ass*?**

AARON JOHNSON: I was brought on quite late to the project – it was last-minute casting. I read the script before I saw the comic books. It's an amazing script and the story of these real life people who are going out and being superheroes, and the reality of it all. It's very different, more edgy and not a commercial superhero movie. Before we started filming, I was checking out the character and looking at the comic books – at that time there were three issues out... I tried to do as much research as I could on that. I looked at Mark Millar's work from before and tried to get into the comic book stuff. I'm not a comic book nerd and I didn't really know very much about it.

CH: **Are you getting into comic books now?**

AJ: Yeah, I've read a lot of Mark Millar's other stuff, and *Watchmen* – all the big graphic novels. And Matthew Vaughn's a fantastic director. He's done a lot of stuff that I really love.

CH: **What's your superhero costume like?**

AJ: It's made from a kind of scuba-diving outfit. It's got to look as if he's bought it on eBay and put it together himself. He's an amateur superhero. It's pretty much exactly the same as the comic book, so that's always a plus. The only adjustment is the mouth, which is a good idea because you don't want to see the whole movie with me mumbling through cloth.

CH: **Does the costume help your performance?**

AJ: Yeah, completely, especially because it's such a transformation from Dave Lizewski, who's got big, curly hair and glasses and baggy American clothes – and then I'm in the suit, and he's gone away from that timid, shy kid; he's turned into this superhero with confidence. It's all about him getting away from that school life. He hasn't got many friends there and he's not popular. His mum has passed away recently, so he's quite a lonely kid. There's a special side to him, and he knows he's got friends in the superhero world.

CH: **Are you enjoying the physical side of it?**

AJ: Yeah, it's good fun. We've got an amazing stunt crew as well. We've got Brian Allen, who's the action director, who's worked with Jackie Chan for many years, and Pung, the choreographer, who's Jet Li's stunt double and works a lot with Hit Girl. So that stuff looks so professional and polished. And we've got all the guys from *300* and *Hellboy*. My fighting skills aren't supposed to be too great, but it's good fun just to wave the bats around and be beaten up all the time.

CH: **Kick-Ass isn't the world's most successful superhero, is he?**

AJ: Yeah, he gets in way over his head and gets involved with these two vigilantes who are disguised as superheroes. He gets caught up with this whole gangster drug ring. The first time he gets into a fight he ends up in hospital and gets metal plates put into his back and his head – after that he can't really feel any pain. But he still can't jump over roofs or fly. He's a hero in his own way. He's only doing the right thing – just not that well.

CH: **Have you met with Mark Millar?**

AJ: Yeah. He's a really sweet, lovely guy. I was kinda scared cos it's his baby, and you just want to do the best you can for him. He's really looking forward to it too, and that makes me feel good.

"HYPOTHETICALLY, IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN INTERESTING TO HAVE CAST SOMEONE LIKE ZAC EFRON AS A BAD GUY. BUT IN MY HEAD I ALWAYS THOUGHT OF CHRIS" JANE GOLDMAN

Hit Girl: foul-mouthed, deadly... and young.

Matthew's. However, he did involve me in the audition process. I attended some of the auditions, but he did the other ones over in the States. I would watch them digitally when they were uploaded at the end of the day. He's very collaborative, in that he looks for input from outside, but the final decisions were his. Luckily, Matthew and I were always in agreement and both liked the same people. It was very nice to be involved in the audition process because as the writer, you're not usually involved."

Goldman was very happy with the casting choices made by the director, as she admits.

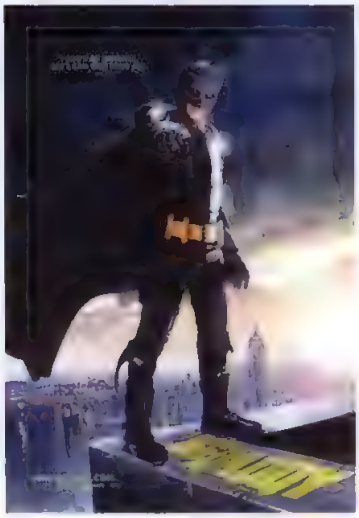
"I was actually particularly excited about Christopher Mintz-Plasse being cast, because he was someone I had in my head from quite early on who I could imagine in that role. Hypothetically, it might have been interesting to have cast someone like Zac Efron as a bad guy. But in my head I always thought of Chris, so when Matthew went ahead and cast him, I was absolutely overjoyed."

A PALPABLE HIT

"Nicolas Cage was amazing. He brought so much to his part. I was massively excited by Matthew's idea to approach him very early on and it paid off brilliantly. We had to write extra stuff for him."

Chloe Moretz's character Mindy Macready/Hit Girl, a pre-teen vigilante, does swear on film, but the writer doesn't see this as anything other than remaining faithful to Millar and Romita Jr's comic

"I think the main thing I wanted to avoid was any sense that we were trying to be deliberately provocative or deliberately push the envelope or be out to shock people," she responds "We absolutely weren't, it just seemed right for the integrity of the character



Q&A

CHRISTOPHER MINTZ-PLASSE

(CHRIS D'AMICO/RED MIST)

By Nick Setchfield

COMIC HEROES: **Do you identify with more – the geek or the superhero?**
CHRISTOPHER MINTZ-PLASSE: Superhero, totally. I always go out at night wearing a costume... I guess a little of both, because I have a badass attitude. I'm not a badass, but I wish I was, and I like comic books. I guess there's a bit of both in me.

CH: **What are your favourite comic books?**
CM-P: My dad is the huge fan. I read whatever he has – *Ultimate Spider-Man* or *X-Men* or whatever is lying around. He has a couple of *Carnage* graphic novels that are really good. I'm going to start reading *Watchmen*...

CH: **Have you read Mark Millar's stuff?**
CM-P: I've read *Kick-Ass*! My dad loves comic books so much that when I saw the *Kick-Ass* script I said, "I know that name from somewhere." I looked at his comics and he had issue one of *Kick-Ass*. So I read that and it was so awesome and so bloody! I read the script based on how much I loved that first issue, then I fell in love with it and got the part. Mark Millar hadn't finished the comic before Matthew and Jane wrote their script, so he based some of the comic on their work, which is cool.

CH: **How does your character fit into the story?**
CM-P: His dad is the main bad guy and he needs to get Kick-Ass. So my character, wanting to bond with his father, comes up with a plan to pose as a superhero and be Kick-Ass's sidekick, then lure him to his dad. But then I realise he's a good guy and things happen and... spoilers!

CH: **Why is he called Red Mist?**
CM-P: It's just what Chris D'Amico thought of when he made his costume. He thought it was cool name. Personally, I'd have thought up something better! But Red Mist works, and it works for the Mistmobile, which is the car he drives.

CH: **Are you relishing the chance to get your teeth into a superhero film?**
CM-P: Yeah, I'm really excited that they let me into an action movie.

CH: **Do you get a lot of nerdy parts offered to you after *Superbad*?**
CM-P: Oh yeah. I've gotten a bunch of horrible scripts where they wanted me to play the virgin character. And I'm done with that.

CH: **How's Matthew to work with as a director?**
CM-P: He's amazing. He knows exactly what he's doing. He lets me and Aaron bring our naturality to it and if there's something not right he'll direct us a different way. But he's a really funny guy. I've done all these comedy movies where the directors are so hilarious and sweet and funny, and I thought Matthew would be very strict. That's the impression I got from the audition. But after working with him for two months I wanna work with him again. He's incredible.

CH: **Did you get a chance to work with Nic Cage?**
CM-P: I worked one day with him. He was really sweet and welcoming. I was just joking around on set, like I do, and he was cracking up. He's down for joking around.

CH: **Are you a practical joker on set, then?**
CM-P: Matthew's more of a practical joker. One of his best friends is deathly afraid of buttons! On a shirt they're fine, but as soon as one pops off he's terrified of it. At his bachelor party, his friend was really drunk in a bathtub for some reason, and Matthew dumped 500 buttons on him!

I hope that's clear, but you can never tell how people are going to interpret things. Chloe plays the character in an absolutely convincing way and to me, Mindy seems like a real, three-dimensional character. We've brought her to life fully rather than as a child playing out a notion that adults thought would be funny. Her swearing is never intended to be a deliberately provocative thing, it's just something that fits well with the character as it did in the comic."

Even though *Kick-Ass* looks like a subversion of the superhero genre, Goldman is at pains to emphasise the fact that both she and Vaughn are huge admirers of the classic superhero movie genre.

"I think that, by its very nature, the story is a different kind of superhero film because it has a lot of nods to the tropes associated with that genre and, in many ways, it eventually turns into a classically structured superhero film. But it also features characters who don't have super powers in a world where everybody is influenced by the same superheroes that we are. So in that sense it's certainly a fresh approach to the superhero genre. Hopefully it's a film that will complement the existing canon. But I hope it feels like a proper superhero film as well as feeling like a different take on that genre."

"I HOPE THAT IT INSPIRES OTHER FILMMAKERS TO STICK TO THEIR VISION AND IF THEY GET TURNED DOWN, TO STAY WITH IT"

JANE GOLDMAN

TEENAGE KICKS

Goldman is reticent to boil *Kick-Ass* down to a one-line high-concept description, because she sees that type of thinking as counter-productive.

"I think it's not really our place to do that. Someone else described it as '*Superbad* meets *Kill Bill*', which isn't a million miles away, but they're always a bit reductive really. I think *Superbad* is a wonderful film and there's an awful lot of humanity in there and great characterisation, and *Kill Bill*'s a fabulous action movie, so I'm hugely flattered by comparisons to either. But at the same time, one of them is a straight romance comedy while the other's a different genre altogether. So while I think those comparisons are very flattering, it's really hard to nail it down. I also think *Kick-Ass* is a weird little film, with a tone of its own that's quite difficult to pinpoint."

With the financing organised by Vaughn himself, this is something else that makes *Kick-Ass* an unusual project.

"I hope that it inspires other filmmakers to stick to their vision and if they get turned down, to stay with it and say, 'This is how my film ought to be made and I'm going to do it.' If this movie inspires another filmmaker to do that, I think that's a great thing and Matthew can be proud of that. I think that would be a good thing for everybody, creatively."

If this film does well enough then there's a chance we could be seeing more *Kick-Ass* on screen, but Goldman is appropriately cautious as to whether or not that will happen.

"It's something that we'd absolutely love to do. We've had informal conversations about it in passing, but no-one wants to jinx it. We just have to see how this one does. Our main focus is just getting this first one out and hoping everyone likes it." CH

Kick-Ass is in UK cinemas on 2 April.

BELOW: Kick-Ass gets stuck in. He's not always so successful at the superhero thing

Q&A

CHLOE MORETZ

(MINDY MACREADY/HIT GIRL)

By Nick Setchfield

COMIC HEROES: What do your family think of all the violent stuff you have to do in the movie?

CHLOE MORETZ: It's a character. My mom reads every script I've ever gone up for. Two weeks before the movie *Wanted* opened I saw all the posters and I was like, "Oh my gosh, I so want to play a role like Angelina Jolie – take charge, that kind of stuff." My mom said, "No, they don't make roles like that for kids." This script came up, my mom read it and said "Oh my gosh, Chloe that's so weird..." I never read scripts, ever, because if you get too attached to a role then you get really sad that you lost it. But she was like "You really should read it, it's an awesome character." So I read it and I was like I *have* to be Hit Girl, totally. It's a crazy role and I love it.

CH: **Did you enjoy working with Nic Cage?**

CM: I learned so much from him. He's a really amazing guy. You learn a lot of stuff from people like that – Oscar winners. Every time we do a different take, he brings new stuff to every line. A different style every single time.

CH: **Do you read comic books yourself?**

CM: My dad is actually a big comic book fan. Ever since he was a kid, he's collected comic books. I'd never heard of *Kick-Ass* before the movie. After I got the role I was like, "Well, I guess I should start reading them!" So I picked up the first comic and I was like, "Wow, this is really hardcore, this is pretty crazy..." And my opening scene is me walking in with the katana sword and chopping people's heads off. I was like, "Wow, that's a grand entrance!"

CH: **She's quite a pottymouth too...**

CM: "She is, but in real life I'm not allowed to say that sort of thing ever. I'd get grounded for *years* if I did. It would be bad. She was raised no better and her dad came from jail. But he really does keep her in line. If she doesn't get up to shake somebody's hand then he'll reprimand her. When she does cuss in front of him, sometimes he's like, "Whoa, Mindy, stop!" So I really think it's Hit Girl coming through in her cussing. But she doesn't really know much better than to cuss.

CH: **Are you secretly enjoying saying those lines?**

CM: It's just a word – it's just an emphasised word. If people didn't think of it as a bad word, it would be just like anything else – like, "Hey, what's up?" It would be no different.

KICK ART

Mark Millar's *Kick-Ass* would be nothing without some art that literally kicks ass. **Nick Setchfield** talks to **John Romita Jr**, the legend behind the pictures...

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It's not easy following a beautiful little girl like that," says John Romita Jr. "I'm not beautiful and neither am I a girl."

Some context? Sure. *Comic Heroes* is on-set for *Kick-Ass*, the movie adaptation of the bruising, brutally amusing comic book by Romita and Mark Millar. We've just been charmed by 11-year-old Chloe Moretz, the screen incarnation of katana-twirling pottymouth Hit Girl. She's just told us she can take a gun apart. Is this a skill that Romita shares?

"No, I cannot take a gun apart," he deadpans. "I can *draw* a gun being taken apart, but that's not quite the same thing. And I'm from New York City. You'd think I'd be able to take apart a gun."

The son of fabled *Spider-Man* artist 'Jazzy' John Romita, this flip, witty New Yorker clearly inherited the superheroic gene. He's illustrated every Marvel icon from Iron Man to the X-Men, while well-received stints on *Amazing Spider-Man* have returned him to his web-slinging ancestral home on a regular basis.

Launched in 2008, *Kick-Ass* doesn't so much deconstruct the superhero myth as give it an excruciating wedgie in the high school locker room. The tale of teen dreamer Dave Lizewski and his quest to bring masked justice to the real world, it's a comic that razzes the genre while cannily channeling its essential wish-fulfilment fantasy. Romita's clearly thrilled to see it brought to the screen.

MAIN IMAGE: Kick-Ass gets his ass kicked Being a superhero is not easy

ABOVE LEFT: Say hello to Hit Girl, a foul-mouthed and very young vigilante

ABOVE RIGHT: Kick Ass admires Hit Girl's handiwork

> "EVERY KID FANTASISES ABOUT ATTEMPTING TO BE A HERO" JOHN ROMITA JR

COMIC HEROES: **How do you explain the success of *Kick-Ass*?**

JOHN ROMITA JR: How deep do you want me to get with the explanation? I think it's a more realistic fantasy, if that's possible. I equate it to *Spider-Man*. When Spider-Man was first created, he was the everyday schmo who became a superhero. Well, this is the everyday schmo who becomes an almost-superhero, and it's as realistic as you can get, given that basic premise. It's what every kid might fantasise about doing. I don't know if they fantasise about becoming vigilantes *per se*, but every kid fantasises about attempting to be a hero. And that's exactly what this is: attempting to be a hero. There's so much more beyond that, because he's actually the forerunner to other people who are doing this exact same thing – the true vigilantes, Big Daddy and Hit Girl. And the ironies are all over the place. It's *Spider-Man* to the real degree.

CH: **Was that always the core idea of the comic book?**

JR: There were two stages. The first was just the father and the daughter, and then the teenager was added later on. Adding the irony of having the struggling teenager trying to become a superhero, it ended up becoming about a struggling vigilante. We have awkward adolescence and add that into it. Again I equate it to *Spider-Man*, because it's similar in a certain way. When Stan Lee created *Spider-Man* it was that struggle of a teenage superhero, and now we've made it more real. It was important that we maintained the awkwardness of a teenager and now the awkwardness of a young girl – who shouldn't actually be awkward, because she's a machine. She's a killing machine, which is such an amazing irony. And here's a strong »

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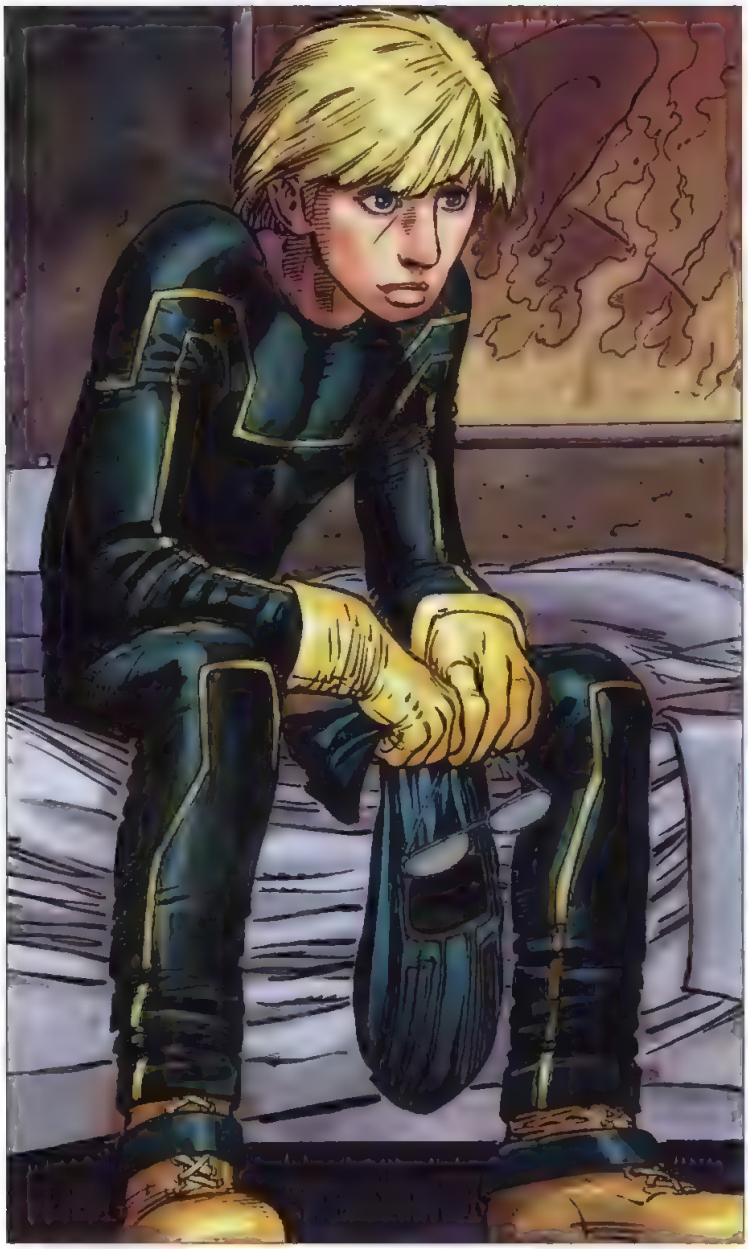
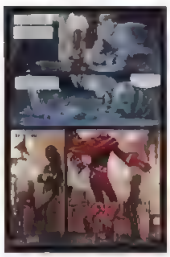
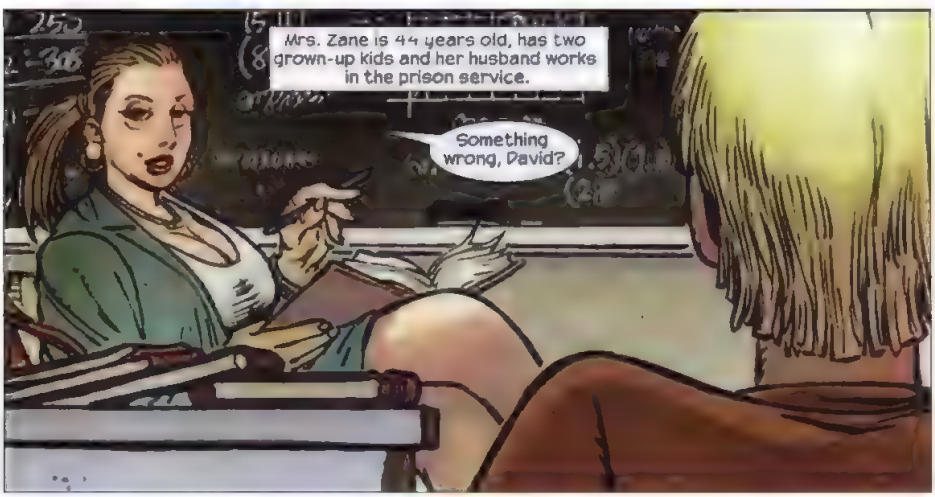




MAIN IMAGE: In *Kick-Ass* a more realistic version of the *Spider-Man* story.

ABOVE: Hit Girl's father Big Daddy is played by Nicolas Cage in the movie

BELOW: Dave Lizewski fantasises about his teacher

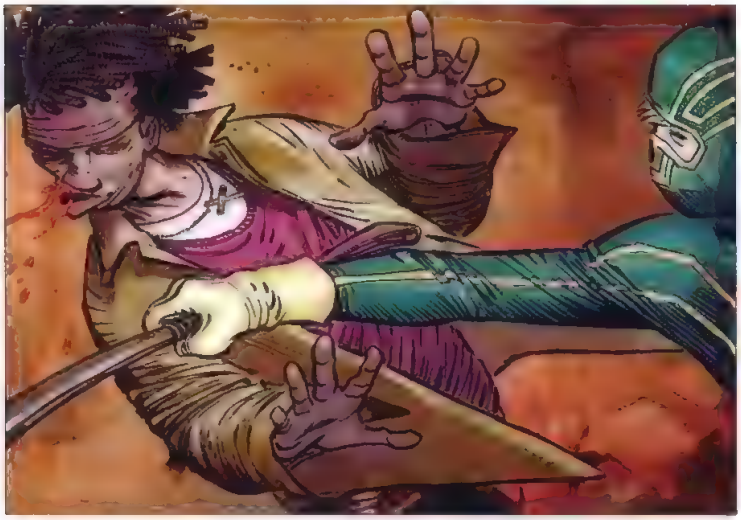


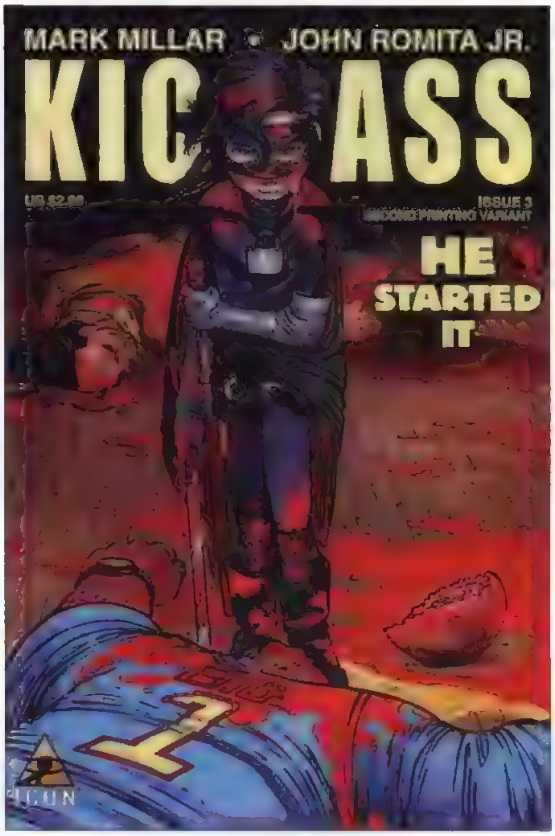
16-year-old kid who's absolutely helpless, and a frail ten-year-old girl who slices and dices people. I love this! So that's the way Mark approached it. Remember now, we're dealing with a 16-year-old. Mark said, "Remember yourself as a 16-year-old..." I said "No, no, we don't want to discuss that!" [Laughs] As an adult, you look funny when you have a skintight costume on – I don't care how good your body is. And then putting it on a 16-year-old with all of the awkwardness that entails... Keep it in mind that when you put a costume on this kid, not only is he awkward literally but he's awkward physically as well. Bear that in mind and it plays into the whole story. I guess 'awkward' is the word we use for pretty much everything

CH: **Does his costume have comedy value for you?**
JR: Absolutely. At least in the comic it does. Remember that when you put a costume on Spider-Man, you don't see the ears showing, you don't see any bulging, if you'll excuse the expression. We wanted to make sure that he looks... not silly, but like an amateur. This is a 16-year-old kid who got his costume off eBay! When he puts it on, everything should show – his hair should be stuffed wrong and his ears should be showing. I remember at one point I had a scene where he has to tuck himself in – excuse me ladies – he's got to position everything so that it doesn't show. And they said, "No, no, that's not necessary!" But it was the first thing I thought of. You put on a Halloween costume and everything is uncomfortable. You have to run behind the nearest tree and make sure everything doesn't show!

CH: **Is he dressing to the left or dressing to the right?**
JR: Exactly! And that's the reason my wife won't let me wear the Spider-Man costume at Halloween. She says, "Unless it's black tights, you're not getting out of the house!" So this is what we have to worry about. And yes, that played into it. He's got to be uncomfortable. The 16-year-old has trouble walking out in his street clothes, let alone walking out in a tight costume. They're an excellent part of the whole movie, those scenes that Matthew brought to it. He looks at himself in the mirror and at first he loves himself. And then when he fails, he hates himself. It's perfect

CH: **So what do you bring to the film?**
JR: I'm bringing the animated sequence – the flashback sequence – which I'm really excited about. It covers the period of time when Big Daddy becomes Big Daddy; when he first gets set up and sent to prison





and then gets out of prison and bonds with his daughter. It's the reason he becomes who he is, told as a flashback in the middle of the movie. It's the only animated moment in the film and it's an interesting scene. I'm excited about it because I get a directorial credit. It'll be a fish story. Every extra drink I have, it'll be a bigger scene... "Oh yes, I directed the whole movie!"

CH: **Do you have a cameo?**
JR: No, I don't. My son has a cameo! I actually don't know... If they throw me in in the next few days then that'll be interesting, but they'll be desperate at that point! My son is so handsome – thank God he looks like his mother – they felt it would be okay to add him to the film

CH: **What do you think of the casting of the movie?**
JR: I love it. It's interesting – before I'd seen their faces, if they'd asked me who to pick for the parts, I probably could have reeled off about 20 names for each one. But I think the casting of Hit Girl is brilliant. It's a great irony to see this little angel spouting these foul words and slicing people up! But Nicolas Cage is an Academy Award winner. You can't go wrong with that. Of course, I imagined a New York cop who was a wiseass with a big, bushy moustache and who's built like one of the thugs – overweight and a real brute. To have a more delicate guy like Nicolas Cage playing the part is interesting. He becomes a brute. Again, this is Matthew Vaughn being much more brilliant than I'll ever be. I would have envisioned different people, but now that I've seen them, there's no one else for those parts.

CH: **Was it exciting for you to work in this medium?**
JR: Oh, absolutely. I think every comic book artist and creator envisions themselves as a director of sorts. We've all fantasised about directing because we do sequential storytelling, which is basically storyboards, which is directing. And I've been doing it long enough that I envision myself being able to do it, and suddenly this has been thrust upon me. I don't know if you can equate this with an athlete who has the chance to score the point needed to win the game. "Oh God, please don't let me screw this up, now I've been given a chance!"

CH: **Is it particularly thrilling to see your own work come into the live action arena?**
JR: I've seen some of the rushes and it looks fantastic. The scenes with the father and the daughter are just shocking and I love them. The initial scenes when he's testing out her body armour... you'd think they'd put it on a dummy! But that's the character

CH: **There has to be something surreal about seeing your art brought to the screen like this.**
JR: There is, but it's an honour and it's flattering. It's like "That looks a lot like what I did." And "That doesn't look like what I did!" I'm trying to be grounded in this. It's something my father always told me – shut up, do your job and be modest. Don't be modest to a fault, though. My father's modest to a fault and I'm learning to be a little bit less like that!

CH: **Have you thought about directing – the Frank Miller career plan?**
JR: I can't say yet. I've thought about it, but then I've also thought about being Brad Pitt! I would love to be a director. I think anybody who's done storyboards or comics – other than being technically adept, you can direct, but you need somebody to help you out, like a director of photography or a cinematographer to do the technical aspects. But I can envision all the scenes – I can see it. Yeah, I've thought about it. But we'll see what happens. I think I'll become Brad Pitt before I become a director!

ABOVE LEFT: *Kick-Ass* isn't short on graphic violence

ABOVE RIGHT: Hit Girl claims another victim And needs a shower

CH: **What are your touchstones in terms of superhero movies?**
JR: The greats? I enjoyed *Iron Man* because of the visuals, and I thought Robert Downey Jr was spectacular. I thought the second *Spider-Man* movie was the better of the three, but I cringe at superhero movies. I always imagine the visuals to be much more subdued. The costumes look garish in real life. And I think that other than *Batman*, which is very dark, I tend to be wary of how they look on film, because the colours are silly on screen. So I worry about that, and yet here we are making a film where they're actually trying to show the silliness of a costume. It's such an amazing irony. I use irony too often... But my favourite superhero movie of all time? This one. I'm not biased, though. [Laughs] Or maybe the one I'm going to direct when I become a mature adult... CH

"A FRAIL TEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL WHO SLICES AND DICES PEOPLE" JOHN ROMITA JR

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YOUR GUIDE TO THE DC UNIVERSE

The DC Universe can be a confusing, scary place for the uninitiated, especially once you start getting into the details of the continuity. But all you need is a guide... like this one. By Chris Brosnahan

DC Comics is one of the two comic companies that have truly stood the test of time. Starting off as National Allied Publications in 1934, it gained early hits with *Adventure Comics*, featuring a massively popular new character called Superman.

Not long after, it was renamed after one of its most popular titles, Detective Comics, although this was shortened to 'DC Comics' because 'Detective Comics Comics' would sound silly. This title featured a number of characters, including a certain Batman, who went on to become one of the most famous icons in pop culture. That's one hell of a track record, even before you throw in Wonder Woman, the Flash, Green Lantern and the first superhero team, 'Justice Society Of America'. Considering that these titles managed to not only keep going during World War 2, but indeed flourished, it's no wonder that it's referred to as the Golden Age of comics.

Of course, at this stage, there were elements of the characters that had yet to be worked out. Batman used guns until it was pointed out that this was unlikely to please parents. Superman didn't fly – he just jumped really, really high. The Flash managed to maintain his secret identity despite taking no precautions to hide it other than wearing a hat. Change was inevitable, especially with radio, TV and cinema series making their own rules. One example of this was the *Superman* radio series, which invented Kryptonite in order to reduce Superman's dialogue to pained groans, enabling the lead actor to take time off.

The Silver Age started when DC took the editorial decision to re-debut a number of characters, with old favourites such as the Flash and Green Lantern gaining new identities and backstories. It also officially laid a certain number of characters to rest, and replaced the Justice Society Of America with the more modern Justice League.

The DC Universe was starting to take shape, although it was a more pained birth than that of the later Marvel Universe, which had taken the shared universe concept into account much earlier in its characters' development. Matters were complicated further by the fact that DC had acquired some characters when it bought out other comic companies – including Quality Comics' Plastic Man and Fawcett Comics' Captain Marvel – and then folded them into its own universe.

Then things got really confusing. Science fiction was becoming popular in entertainment, and comics were no exception. The weirdness factor in DC went into overdrive, and heroes were regularly sent through time and space. The concept of 'parallel worlds' was inevitable, and it wasn't long before Wonder Woman travelled to an alternate Earth in 1953 and met her counterpart, Princess Tara Terruna.

The floodgates were open. An 'Earth II' was established in *Flash* #123 (September 1961) when the Golden Age Flash turned up. The Justice Society returned after 12 years in exile and crossed over with the Justice League in a story called 'Crisis On Earth One' (August 1963). This was popular enough to warrant a new Crisis almost every year, with an ever-expanding number of Earths.

The crossovers were a success, and soon there were multiple versions of every character. A Superman who was married to Lois Lane. A Batman who married Talia al Ghul and had a child who became Robin II, while Dick Grayson became Batman II. A world where the Justice League was a crime syndicate and Lex Luthor was the world's greatest hero. Things needed tidying up.

> "SUPERMAN JUST JUMPED REALLY HIGH"

So, on DC's 50th anniversary, writer Marv Wolfman managed to get clearance for a maxi-series to do just that... And so begins our journey through the history of the DC Universe. »

CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS (1985)

The entire event takes place because of two opposing forces, the Monitor and the Anti-Monitor. The Anti-Monitor is essentially anti-life and sets out to destroy the entire Multiverse, while the Monitor tries to stop him. They build armies against each other, with the Anti-Monitor not only using the spooky emotional manipulator Psycho-Pirate to instill fear in the universes, but also corrupting the Monitor's lieutenant, Harbinger. The Monitor, meanwhile, uses heroes from different versions of Earth after sacrificing himself to save the last handful of realities. Got that?

Finally, Earth-2 Superman, Earth-3 Alexander Luthor (the only hero on his planet) and Earth-Prime Superboy make the ultimate sacrifice, taking down the Anti-Monitor and exiling themselves for eternity. A new Earth is created with a single continuity, and this has remained the primary source of DC continuity since.

The number of characters in this series is insane, with almost every DC hero and villain appearing somewhere, and many getting full plot-time. By the time the good guys and bad guys have joined together to take the battle to the Anti-Monitor, it's fairly overwhelming. Nothing like this had ever been seen before, and very few stories have approached the sheer scale and majesty of it since. Even *Hellblazer*'s John Constantine pops up along the way.

So, if this set out to simplify things, what went wrong? Well, with the sheer number of characters and amount of history involved, it would have been a superhuman feat to tie it all up with a neat little bow. There were inconsistencies here and there, and contradictions eventually cropped up. On top of that, some fans didn't like the idea that the stories they'd read in their youths never actually happened, which was a justifiable complaint.

But it's still a staggeringly ambitious piece of work, beautifully illustrated by George Perez.

Alex Ross drew this lovely 'Crisis' artwork.

WORTH READING?

It's well written and generally flows together nicely, but it's a daunting piece of work. Build your way up to this one and you'll enjoy it a lot more. There's a lot to discover here.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS IT?

It genuinely doesn't get more important than this in DC Comics. The post-'Crisis' universe was effectively the New Testament of the DC bible.

MEMORABLE MOMENT

The Flash dies. It's still a stunning moment to this day.

ARMAGEDDON 2001 (1991)

This mini-series is a universe-spanning story, featuring the mystery behind the identity of the future dictator Monarch. Monarch is a former hero who turned all Darth Vader and wiped out the other heroes, but because he wore a mask and full body suit, nobody knows his identity. The pieces are all in place for an enormous mystery, which is solved by the time-travelling Linear Man, Waverider.

It's eventually revealed that Hank Hall (Hawk) becomes Monarch after slaying his future evil self in revenge for killing his partner, Dove.

So, yes, he becomes the Big Bad by killing himself for being a murderer. It's a simple enough concept, right? Right? Hello?

WORTH READING?

Not really. The central mystery was fluffed after the ending was changed due to spoilers leaking. As a result, the story is full of plot holes. This also kickstarts the unfortunate trend of minor characters being the central point of the crossovers.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS IT?

You'll need a working knowledge to understand this. It ended the series 'Hawk and Dove' and introduced Monarch and Waverider who will turn up again later.

MEMORABLE MOMENT

Your brain melting as it tries to make sense of the ending.

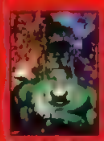
Captain Atom took part in 'Armageddon'.

WHO'S WHO?

DC's habit of having multiple people assume the same identity can be confusing. Here are some notes on the big names.

Batman

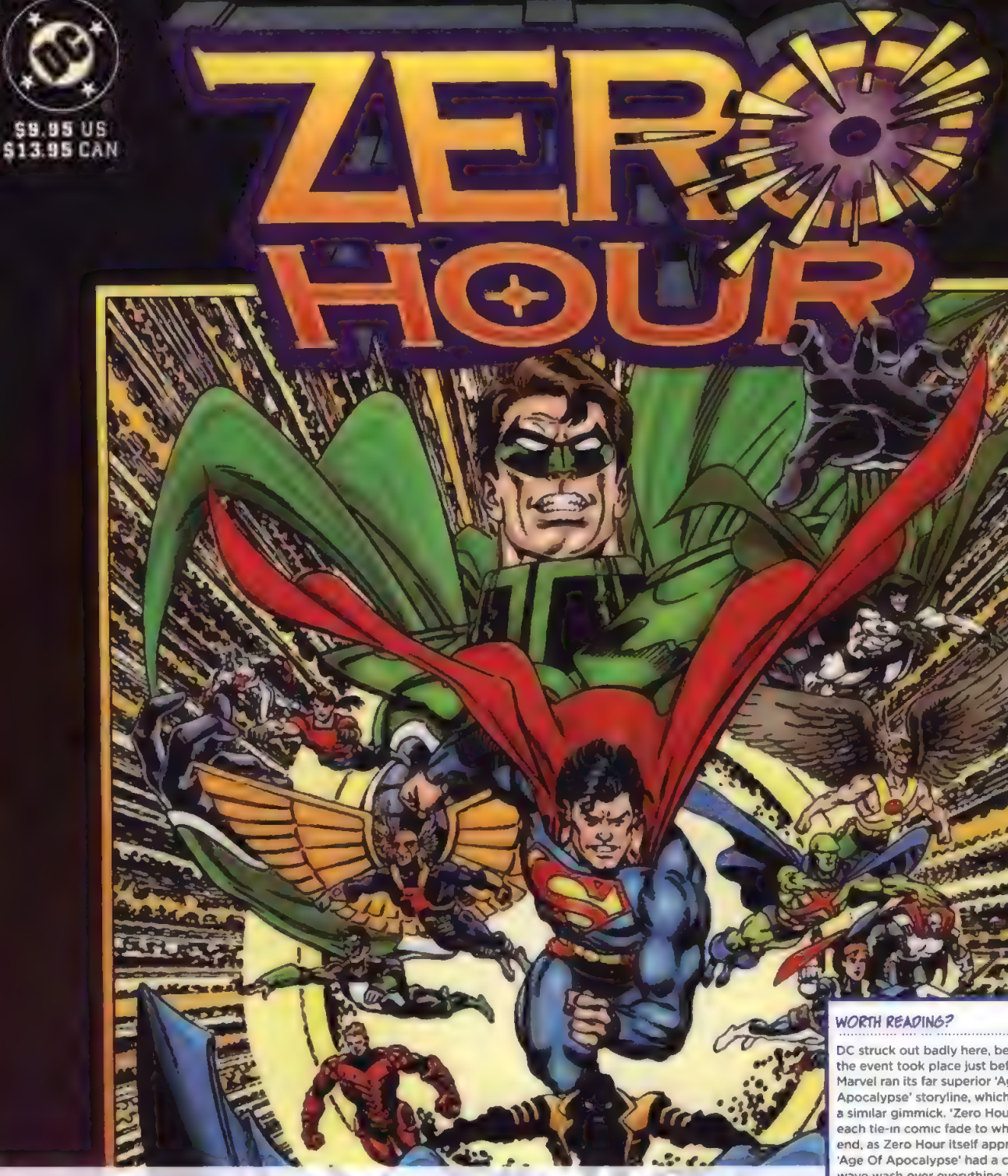
The Flash



Green Lantern

Supergirl/ Superboy

Robin



ZERO HOUR (1994)

The end and beginning of time are linked in a permanent loop, with the universe contracting into entropy and then expanding out into the Big Bang. Monarch morphs into the more '90s and Spawn-like Extant, and appears to be trying to wipe out the loop, destroying the past and present and whittling his way down to the present day.

People start turning up from past, present and alternative universes. Dick Grayson's Robin wanders into the story, and Batgirl turns up and gets incredibly confused. Meanwhile, time-travelling characters start disappearing. This story is all about the twist two-thirds of the way through. The villain of the piece is actually the Green Lantern, Hal Jordan, driven mad after the destruction of his home city and possessed by the demon Parallax.

Unfortunately, the heavy hitters don't really do much here. The focus is on secondary characters – specifically Waverider. The heroes attempt to effectively jumpstart the Big Bang, using a young hero called Damage to expand enough energy to recreate all of time and space.

Waverider and Damage didn't get the lunchboxes, TV series and general pop culture acceptance of other characters, so don't be surprised when you don't recognise them.

WORTH READING?

DC struck out badly here, because the event took place just before Marvel ran its far superior 'Age Of Apocalypse' storyline, which had a similar gimmick. 'Zero Hour' had each tie-in comic fade to white at the end, as Zero Hour itself approached. 'Age Of Apocalypse' had a crystal wave wash over everything and then shatter. As a result, it's impossible not to compare the two titles, and the dialogue, artwork and pacing of 'Zero Hour' are badly dated. And Superman has a mullet.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS IT?

Hal Jordan redeemed himself, but his fall from grace is fairly important even now. From that point of view, it's worth reading.

MEMORABLE MOMENT

Batgirl watches all her alternative universe allies fighting against Extant and Hal, and realises that if they win, she is doomed.

KINGDOM COME (1996)

This is a four-part prestige special, set a couple of generations in the future. While surrounded by religious allegory that may irritate some readers, the story is about belief in oneself. Superman loses his faith and exiles himself after new hero Magog is acquitted for killing the Joker (on the grounds that he deserves to die). This leads to a new generation of superheroes without any sense of responsibility for those less powerful. Wonder Woman eventually convinces Kal-El to return after an explosion destroys Kansas, and the two start an inevitable superhuman war.

Left unchecked, this war will destroy humanity as collateral damage, so when mankind decides to drop the bomb on the lot of them and get rid of the problem once and for all, who is morally right? This is further confused by the odd spectacle of Lex Luthor teaming up with Batman.

WORTH READING?

Absolutely. Alex Ross's artwork and Mark Waid's scripting combine beautifully to create a great story. On top of that, the moral quandaries are genuinely interesting. This is an ideal starting point to ease yourself into the lunacy of the DC Universe.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS IT?

It's become less so over time, but for about ten years, this tale was massively important to continuity. Now it's more important for its format and style, which take Ross's previous work to a much bigger level of storytelling.

MEMORABLE MOMENT

Having just witnessed an unspeakable tragedy, Superman stands up, a being of pure rage. Those red eyes have never looked so scary.

THE KINGDOM (1999)

Okay, so the Multiverse was created to fix continuity issues, but gave rise to a raft of new problems 'Crisis On Infinite Earths' attempted to make things right with a big time-travelling event, but that made matters worse. 'Zero Hour' attempted to fix that with *another* big time-travelling event, but created yet more complications.

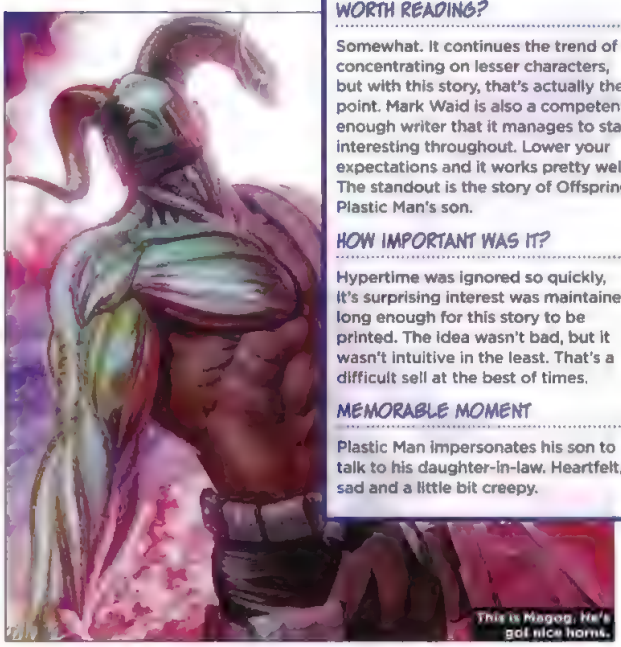
Obviously there was only one thing to do, which was to create a new big time-travelling event, putting in place a new concept called 'Hypertime'. What could possibly go wrong?

When Superman worshipper William Matthews loses his faith in the 'Kingdom Come' universe and gains massive superpowers, killing Superman once isn't enough. Instead, he goes back earlier and kills him again. And then back earlier, and earlier, and earlier. This causes problems in the future timeline, leading 'Kingdom' Supes, Wondy and Bats to go back in time and try to avoid Kansas being blown up earlier than it should be.

We find out that Magog has been going through alternate realities, as well as back in time (due to the fact that 'Hypertime' exists), basically undoing everything the Crisis set in motion and confusing an entirely new generation who hadn't carefully read all the previous stories.

The basic new set-up? All the continuity, pre- and post-Crisis is valid. It all happened in pretty much the same way as the Multiverse, except a bit more fluid. Events can impact other timelines, except when they don't.

Look, it's a Grant Morrison concept, okay? If you're familiar with his work, you'll already know what that means. If you're not, just think about the bit in Austin Powers II where his eyes go crossed. It's roughly the same thing.



WORTH READING?

Somewhat. It continues the trend of concentrating on lesser characters, but with this story, that's actually the point. Mark Waid is also a competent enough writer that it manages to stay interesting throughout. Lower your expectations and it works pretty well. The standout is the story of Offspring, Plastic Man's son.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS IT?

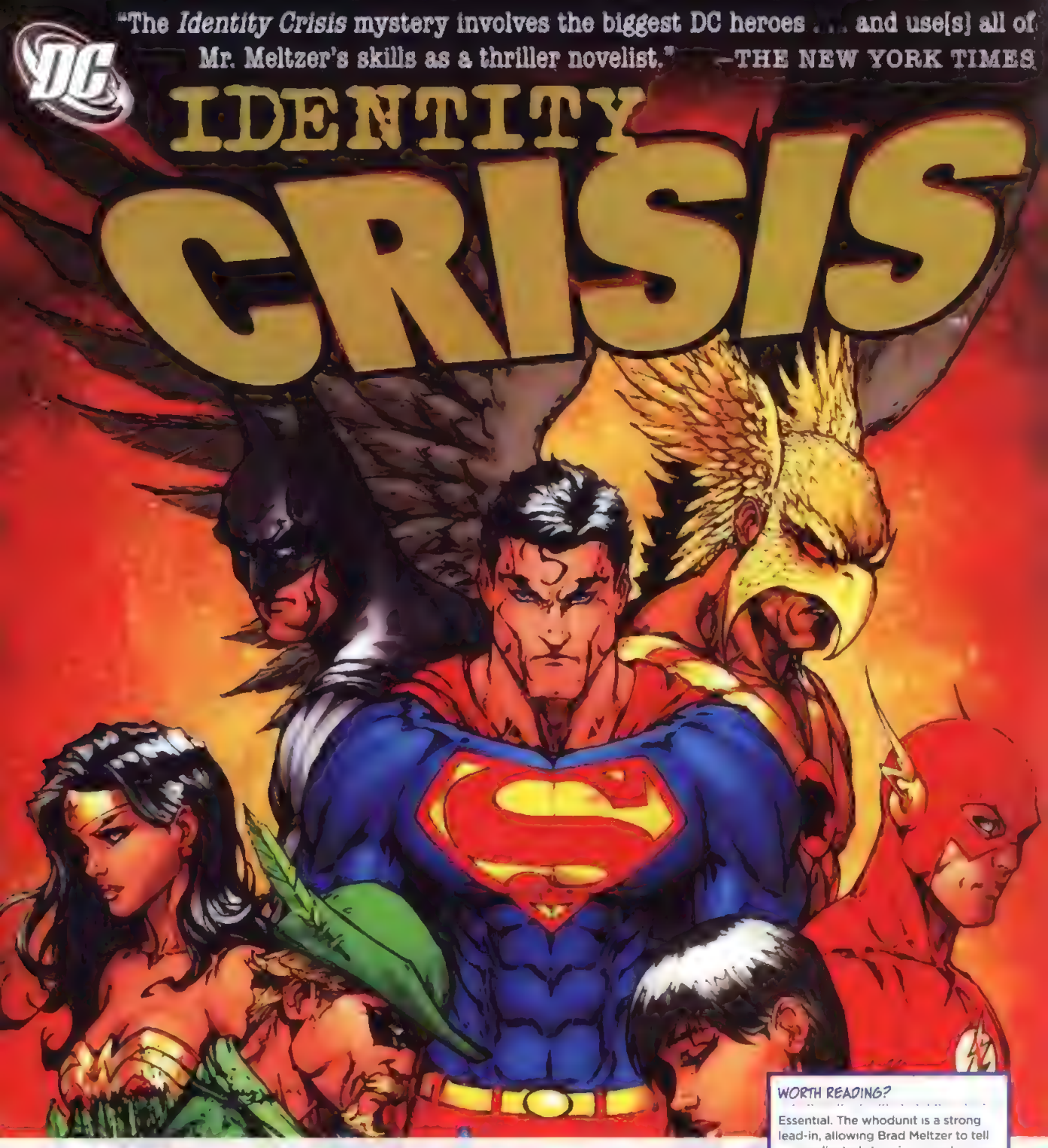
Hypertime was ignored so quickly, it's surprising interest was maintained long enough for this story to be printed. The idea wasn't bad, but it wasn't intuitive in the least. That's a difficult sell at the best of times.

MEMORABLE MOMENT

Plastic Man impersonates his son to talk to his daughter-in-law. Heartfelt, sad and a little bit creepy.

"The *Identity Crisis* mystery involves the biggest DC heroes . . . and use[s] all of Mr. Meltzer's skills as a thriller novelist." —THE NEW YORK TIMES

IDENTITY CRISIS



IDENTITY CRISIS (2004)

When Sue Dibny, wife of the Elongated Man, is brutally murdered, the super community is shaken like never before. It's one thing to threaten to destroy the world – it's entirely another to threaten those closest to the superheroes. With a possible serial killer on the loose – one who knows everyone's secret identity – who is safe?

As disturbing as this is, a secret is revealed about the Justice League. Ever wonder how secret identities are kept so effectively? Do memory-wipes and enforced personality changes seem particularly heroic to you?

Probably the most surprising of DC's major stories, 'Identity Crisis' explores some of the characters' motivations and worries in a unique way. By focusing on the minute details of their lives, the story ends up feeling larger than most cosmic-level tales. We get to see a lot of heroes and villains during their downtime in this story, and it makes the characters feel much more real.

That's part of why this story is so good. When the characters feel real, you care about them. Then when the writer delivers emotional gutshots to them, as Brad Meltzer does, you care even more.

WORTH READING?

Essential. The whodunit is a strong lead-in, allowing Brad Meltzer to tell a complicated story in a simple way This is your best introduction to the modern DC Universe

HOW IMPORTANT WAS IT?

Its effects are still being felt. The death of Sue Dibny and identity of the murderer introduced a sense of emotion and urgency not seen on this scale Everything in this one matters, because the focus is on emotional impact rather than continuity

MEMORABLE MOMENT

The Flash realises something about his teammates' story doesn't add up They're keeping something from him

INFINITE CRISIS (2006)

Wonder Woman, left with no other option, snaps a villain's neck. This is the last straw for Earth-2 Superman and Lois Lane, as well as Earth-3 Alexander Luthor and Superboy Prime. They didn't sacrifice their entire realities to watch the DC Universe become darker, more realistic and more mature, so they're going to destroy this world in order to bring back the Multiverse

This story makes major changes to the DC Universe in ways not seen since the original 'Crisis', but it never loses track of why they are happening. This is an attempt to redefine characters, rather than clean up continuity. The world has become a dark place and an older generation of heroes attempt to make it all right again

The most fun part of the story is watching Superboy Prime become frighteningly powerful. He ends up being imprisoned by the Green Lantern Corps in the middle of a red sun, never ever to escape. Until he escapes not long afterwards. D'oh

WORTH READING?

Yes, although it threatens to become overwhelming at times. The art is great and dynamic throughout, and there are a number of nice little moments. Earth-2 Superman homages the first Superman cover by lifting a car – in order to hit Earth-1 Superman with it.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS IT?

Fairly important, because everything is a lot more linear at the moment. It re-established Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman as the centre of the DC Universe, while giving space for other characters to breathe. It also tied directly into the superb spin-off series '52'. This chronicled the events in the year following 'Infinite Crisis', and established the new Multiverse of 52 Earths.

MEMORABLE MOMENT

Superboy Prime savagely beating and murdering the Titans, while blaming them for sullying his perfect nature. 'You're ruining me!'

FINAL CRISIS (2008)

The evil 'new god' Darkseid is effectively the ultimate adversary for all of humanity. He's in the middle of a difficult attempt to possess a resistant new host body, while also trying to take over all of existence.

The supervillains are getting organised under the charismatic Libra. Martian Manhunter is brutally murdered. Superman is sidelined. Wonder Woman is corrupted. Batman is captured. This is the perfect time for Darkseid to unleash the Anti-Life Equation. The second anyone hears this, they fall into despair and are under Darkseid's control. Humanity is being perverted and reality is collapsing.

An army of Supermen and other superheroes from around the Multiverse take the fight to Darkseid, but the game is changed by a single gunshot fired by the least likely person. Meanwhile, the Flash returns from the original Crisis, chasing a bullet back through time. Yes, you read that correctly. Any attempt to explain more would be futile - you're going to need to tackle this one.

WORTH READING?

Yes, but for the sake of your sanity, don't try to do it first. It's horrendously complex and detailed, and you'll probably need to read it a couple of times. It also works on a number of levels, one of which is to read the Anti-Life Equation as a metaphor for depression.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS IT?

At the moment, enormous. While he will inevitably return, the death of Batman has led to huge changes in the Bat-titles.

MEMORABLE MOMENT

After spending recent years getting increasingly controlling, Batman breaks his only rule - and by doing so, gives choice back to humanity. It's either the low or the high point of Morrison's run, depending on your point of view.

BLACKEST NIGHT (2009/10)

This is currently running, and at the time of writing had not been finished. During Geoff John's run on *Green Lantern*, readers have been introduced to a full spectrum of Lanterns, each running on an emotion (the Green Lantern's, incidentally, is willpower).

However, from the corpse of the Anti-Monitor, the deadliest rings yet have been created - the Black Rings, which represent the complete absence of life. These rings reanimate the dead and feed on the living. However, unlike most straight zombie stories, they gain strength from doing this – and even more if their victim is in a heightened emotional state.

So these Black Lanterns don't just want to eat you - they also want to screw with your head first. And they're very, very hungry. Led by the truly disturbing Nekron, Blackest Night will no doubt get worse before it gets better. Especially with the number of superheroes who have returned from the grave over the years... CH

WORTH READING?

Yes. The different Lanterns are a great idea and it's a messed up story. It's also utterly disturbing on every level, but looks great and is well written and paced.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS IT?

It may have finally thrust Green Lantern into the comics A-list. Also, the tweaking of the Lanterns' mythology works on a galactic scale.

MEMORABLE MOMENT

When you need to create a new Orange Lantern, who operates on greed, who could be a better choice than Lex Luthor?

'Blackest Night' is currently ongoing.

ALAN MOORE'S ALMOST CRISIS

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO...

BANDE DESSINÉE

Comics aren't just an American thing, oh no. Guy Haley crosses the Channel to take a look at the bandes dessinées of France, the world's third-largest producer of comics.

Think comics and you think superheroes, but it wasn't always thus. Once upon a time, comics all over the world covered a wide range of subjects – police drama, comedy, erotica, cowboys and indians, science fiction, fantasy, historical adventure – you name it and comics did it for the mass market.

Superheroes, though, are an Anglo thing. Look to France, the world's third-largest publisher of comics after the US and Japan, and you'll see a much wider range of material. There, as in Japan, comics aren't 'just for kids'.

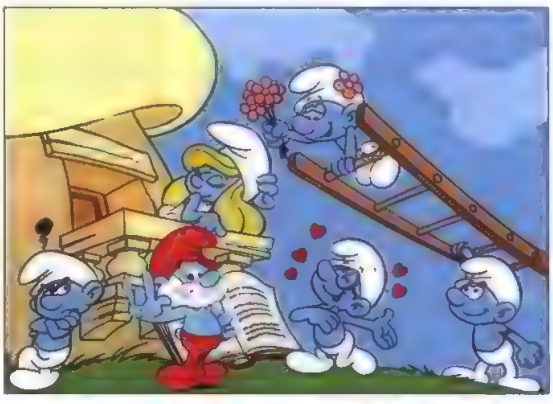
The very term 'comic strip' in English is an indicator of how the medium is viewed in the Anglophone world, derived from 'comic', as in 'funny', because originally the subject matter for English-language comic strips was almost entirely humorous. When the comic strip became a common component of US newspapers in the early 20th century, establishing many of the conventions of the art as we know it today, the Americans called them 'the funny papers' – and that hasn't helped either. There's a real perception of comics as 'low art' in our Anglo-Saxon societies; a perception that, when looking at the somewhat juvenile antics of costumed superheroes, is perhaps not entirely without merit.

Astérix is an obvious example of the form

BELOW: The Smurfs. They're clearly not superheroes, but are very blue indeed.

THE NINTH ART

In contrast, the French term for comic, 'bande dessinée', means simply 'drawn strip'. In France, the work of comic writers and artists is referred to as 'the ninth art', the final result of a series of 20th century extensions of the five classical arts (which were, fact fans, architecture, painting, sculpture, music and poetry). But even on the Continent, comic art wasn't always



held in high regard. Rodolphe Töpffer, the Swiss caricaturist and teacher commonly regarded as fathering the modern comic strip with his 'Histoire de M Vieux Bois' (1827), described his nascent art form as suitable only for children and the working classes.

COMIC CULTURE

In England, comic publishing hangs by a thread (although English writers and artists rule the roost in the US). The form, bar a few exceptions, is looked down upon. But in France, comics are going strong. They cover a much wider subject matter, have a much wider audience, and are held at their highest levels of expression to be genuine art. While our book retailers may have a small section devoted to graphic novels, in France large areas of a shop are given over to comics.

Why this should be the case is hard to pin down. Comics are equally venerable in both cultures. Perhaps one important factor is that bandes dessinées are an important feature of children's lives in France. *The Smurfs*, *Astérix* and *Tintin* are but a few examples of the more famous creations to have come out of the Continent. These three in particular have reached a global audience and yet there are many more – comic cowboy hero *Lucky Luke*, written by *Astérix* co-creator René Goscinny, being one massive success, but barely half his adventures have made their transition into English. Who here has heard of long-running bizarre journalism series *Spirou et Fantasio*, or the barbarian myth epic *Thorgal*? On the other hand, comics were once a staple of the nursery here too, but are no longer.

Maybe a bigger factor in the success of the bande dessinée lies in its format. Although many famous series began their lives in multi-strip comics or newspapers such as *Spirou*, *Pilote* or *Métal Hurlant*, comic book albums (which we would call graphic novels) have been the standard in France for more than half a century. Comprising around 60 pages each, slightly larger than A4, the quality of printing, bindings and paper put US and British comics to shame for decades. Until the '80s, most British comic readers' experience of a graphic novel would have been through translations of these lavish continental books. The term graphic novel only came into being in the English language in the 1970s, partly as a means of capturing dignity for the art form, a dignity we could argue French comics always possessed, because French comic book albums aren't a pocket-money item. When in France, as elsewhere in the European-influenced world, dwindling circulation caused weekly and monthly comics to close, the album market was already strong.

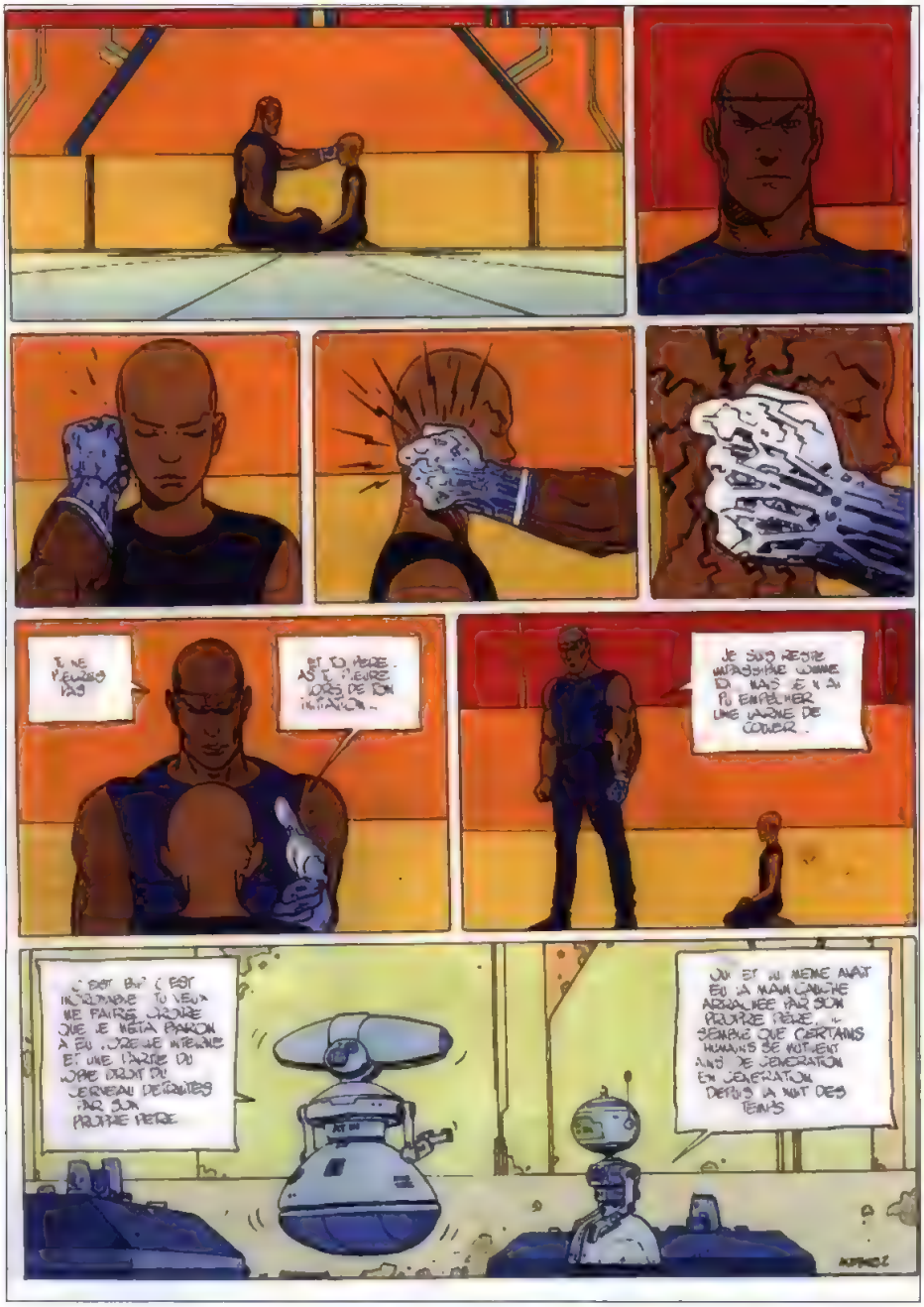
French comics also transcend linguistic boundaries. In fact, it's a misnomer to call them French at all. The preferred term is Franco-Belgian, for many were created by both Walloon and Flemish Belgians – *Tintin*, *Lucky Luke* and *The Smurfs* are all Belgian. But it goes further than the Francophonie and their Dutch-speaking neighbours. Bandes dessinées and their creators are truly multinational, truly European. The

"IN FRANCE, COMICS ARE GOING STRONG. THEY COVER A MUCH WIDER SUBJECT MATTER, HAVE A MUCH WIDER AUDIENCE, AND ARE HELD AT THEIR HIGHEST LEVELS OF EXPRESSION TO BE GENUINE ART"

Heavy Metal is the Anglicised version of the French *Metal Hurlant*

The very Belgian *Spirou* Spirou is the name of the comic and a character in it

Metal Hurlant is... sexy


JE NE PENSAIS PAS
ET JE NIERAI JUSQU'À MA DERNIÈRE GOUTTE DE SANG
JE SUIS RESTÉ IMPASSIBLE COMME UN MAÎTRE ZEN ET JE N'AI PU EMPÊCHER UNE LARME DE COULER.
C'EST BIEN C'EST INTOLÉRABLE TU VEUX ME FAIRE CROIRE QUE LE META BARON A EU UNE CRISE D'ÂME ET UNE PARTIE DU CORPS DROIT DU CERVEAU DÉTRUITES PAR SON PROPRE PÈRE
OUI ET JE MENS AVAIT EU LA MAIN GAUCHE ARRACHÉE PAR SON PROPRE PÈRE... JE SENS QUE CERTAINS HUMAINS SE MUTENT AVEC DE GÉNÉRATION EN GÉNÉRATION DEPUIS LA NUIT DES TEMPS

Drawing a line

There are three main styles of Franco-Belgian comic art. Here's a brief description of each:

REALISTIC

Detailed artwork where no comic exaggeration or illustrative shorthand is employed. If coloured, this art is generally realistically tinted without much block shading or primary colours.
Examples: *Blueberry* by Moebius, *Thorgal* by Grzegorz Rosinski.
Anglo equivalents: *Conan* by Barry Windsor-Smith, *Garth* by Frank Bellamy.

COMIC DYNAMIC

Cartoon-like drawing, influenced by Disney, also referred to as the 'Marcinelle school'. Popularised by the Belgian weekly *Spirou*, it's more concerned with movement than the related 'ligne claire' style. Characters are caricatures. Sound effects and motion lines are the norm, while the lines in the drawings vary in thickness to denote action and motion.
Examples: *Astérix* by Albert Uderzo, *Lucky Luke* by Morris, *Spirou et Fantasio* by Jijé.
Anglo equivalents: *Dennis The Menace* by David Law, *Scrooge McDuck* by Carl Barks.

SCHEMATIC DRAWING

'Ligne claire' ('clear line') in French, the schematic style is also called 'slow drawing' and 'the democracy of lines'. Pioneered by Hergé, although the characters in this style are caricatures, they're drawn with even lines and set against meticulously rendered backgrounds. 'Special effects' are used sparingly
Examples: *Tintin* by Hergé, *Wake* by Philippe Buchet.
Anglo equivalents: *Big Guy And Rusty The Boy Robot* by Geof Darrow, *Where's Wally?* by Martin Handford.

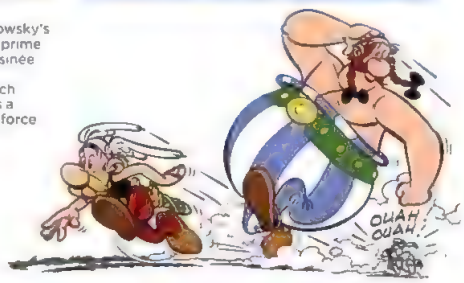
'ninth art' has been influential on British, American, Italian, Spanish, Latin American and German creators; people like Frank Bellamy, Robert Crumb and the Italian Guido Crepax, originator of sexy heroine Valentina, and many of their works appeared in *Pilote* and *Metal Hurlant*. Astérix's creators, for example, were Italian and Polish.

THE EASTERN TOUCH

Recently, this trans-border art has gone transcontinental. The French have been captivated by Japanese art for 200 years, so it's only natural that a synergy should develop between the bande dessinée and manga. The

Jodorowsky's *Metabarons* is a prime sci-fi bande dessinée

The French artist Moebius is a driving creative force



"GRAPHIC NOVELS HAVE BEEN THE STANDARD IN FRANCE FOR MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY"

'80s saw a number of long-running Franco-Japanese collaborations in the arena of comics' moving counterparts, TV cartoons – *Ulysses 31* (based on the *Odyssey*) and Inca adventure *The Mysterious Cities Of Gold* being just two. Unlike the anime we saw in the UK and US, which were translations of Japanese shows, these were fully fledged co-productions. There's even a school of bande dessinée manga, called La Nouvelle Manga, formed of Japanese and Franco-Belgian creators who wish to fully exploit Japanese manga's broad subject matter. It's a small part of the trade, but an interesting one. Meanwhile, sci-fi/adventure manga (differentiated by the masculine definite article 'le') now accounts for fully one quarter of all comics sales in France.

So, although from our point of view comics mean superheroes, and for non-fans that means juvenilia, Anglo comics are merely one small part of a vast and vibrant international tradition. Sadly, although many albums do get translated into English, we rarely get to see full runs – readership figures prove too low. (A good recent example is *Wake*, a great space opera discontinued halfway through by its American translators. They also censored the heroine's naked breasts, but that's another story.) That's where you come in. There's more to bandes dessinées than *Astérix* and *Tintin*; go out and buy some, you'll be amazed at what sci-fi gems you'll find.

Mills's Crossing

Known as the godfather of British comics, Pat Mills's efforts on multiple UK titles was inspired not by Superman, but by European bandes dessinées.

2000 AD launch editor Mills is famous as the man behind *Nemesis The Warlock*, *ABC Warriors*, *Charley's War* and *Marshal Law*. Never mad keen on the superhero, he's always loved French comics' wider scope. He's currently engaged in writing *Requiem: Vampire Knight* with French artist Olivier Ledroit, a dark and twisted fantasy set in Hell, where morality is turned on its head: the good are weak and powerless and those who were evil in their mortal lives are rewarded with great power as vampires. It's Mills's third series for the French market.

COMIC HEROES: **Is it true that you'd always wanted to break into French comics rather than the American market?**
PAT MILLS: *2000 AD* was based on French comics like *Métal Hurlant*. *Nemesis*, for example, is very heavily influenced by the French artist Caza. This was my role model for *2000 AD*, but I put a greater emphasis on heroes and action, bypassing the arthouse and sex aspects of *MH*, which wouldn't have suited our market.

There was nothing 'inevitable' about *2000 AD* contributors working for the US, which is sometimes the impression you get today. Shortly after the *2000 AD* launch, a group of us produced sample pages for *Mekomania*, a robot history of the future, which we submitted to Dargaud in France. It didn't happen, but that gives an idea of our thinking at the time. I'd suggest the States was a second choice for a number of us. It was inevitable that I would want to work in France.

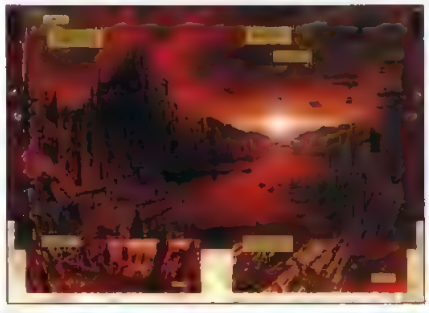
CH: **Naturally, the varied types of comic that the French make once existed in the US and the UK, but why did all of them survive and prosper on the Continent?**
PM: The French give creator rights – it's enshrined in EU law – which is not something US/UK publishers are particularly comfortable with, even today. The US/UK favour house-owned characters. But if you own the rights it becomes a true labour of love. This leads to an emphasis on quality, which is reflected in diversity and sometimes larger sales. After Japan, I believe France is the biggest comic producer in the world. You wouldn't realise this because there isn't the same widespread merchandising as there is with Marvel superheroes.

CH: ***Requiem*** **is pretty out-there stuff! Could you possibly get away with a story like this in the UK or the States?**
PM: It's gone down well in the States, so I guess it's not a problem. It's written and painted in a very *2000 AD* style, with elements of superheroes in the action art, so that makes it very accessible. The dark is 'Gothic', rather than anything ultra-disturbing. It's probably sexier than an equivalent US/UK book – but hey, it's a French artist!

CH: **There's a theme of punishment and judgment running through your work, and we know you're concerned with issue-based stories. How do you square your anti-war messages with the stories' violence? And do you think the French do this better?**
PM: I think all stories should have something to say and be entertaining, too. Thus *Charley's War* is entertaining; it's also violent but is acknowledged as a strong anti-war book. *Requiem* uses violence in a different way to a comparable end. The French are less wary about polemics than we are. For example, I had one character in *Requiem* who was based on a famous real-life person who I believe was extremely hypocritical. So I wrote a very fierce version of the character with a fair amount of detail on their secret life. Then, after listening to the 'entertainment only' faction in the UK, I chickened out. But Olivier liked the passion and insisted it all went back in. That's a very French perspective, I think. Bear in mind they had a successful revolution, so subversive stories are part of their culture! Whereas we still have our ancient regime.

CH: **Why is it that the mainland European comics style receives less acclaim here than its American counterpart?**
PAT MILLS: The French books don't always travel well, alas. Thus Enki Bilal's stories and art are fabulous but aren't hero-centric and this is what the US/UK market is looking for. *Valerian*, by *The Fifth Element* concept artist Jean-Claude Mézières, is more hero-centric but possibly too gentle for the UK/US market. UK/US heroes have to have a certain weight and style behind them. *Requiem* has this approach and there are other French series heading down this road, so it could change.

Requiem: Vampire Knight is published by Panini in the UK. The first four books are available now in two volumes from Amazon.



BANDE DESSINEE SPOTLIGHT

TINTIN

There are only a handful of bande dessinée that have achieved widespread popularity in the English-speaking world. *Asterix* is one; *The Smurfs*, mainly through their TV cartoons and toys, another. But perhaps the greatest is *The Adventures Of Tintin*, says Guy Haley.

Tintin is a bold Belgian boy reporter whose investigative journalism draws him into all kinds of trouble. During his lifetime, Tintin has foiled coups and drug gangs, visited countries all over the world, gone to the bottom of the sea and stepped foot on the Moon. His stories cover spy adventures, SF, fantasy, comedy and satire. There's much depth in *Tintin*, if one knows where to look.

Tintin's creator Georges Remi, or, as he is best known, Herge, was born in Belgium in 1907. He had very little artistic training, but his natural talent for drawing led to his working on the Catholic newspaper *Le XXe Siècle* (The 20th Century) whose editor, Abbe Norbert Wallez, was to have a huge influence on Herge's early work. In 1928, Herge was charged with producing material for *Le Petit Vingtième*, the paper's children's supplement. He started by illustrating its established strips, but was soon asked by Wallez to create a morally upright character who would travel the world. Thus Tintin embarked on the first of his first adventures: *Tintin In The Land Of The Soviets*.

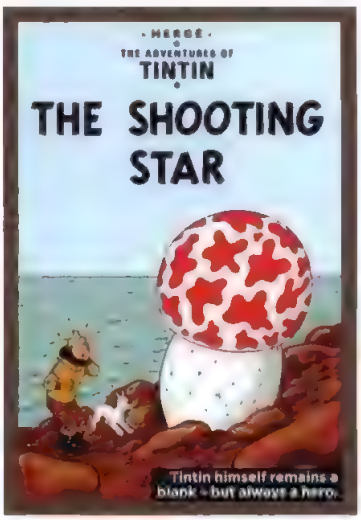
Tintin's exploits were based on Herge's brother Paul, who was a soldier, an earlier character named Totor and the adventurous photographer Robert Sexe. He's an everyman. On the one hand he is idealistic, brave, knowledgeable and strong – qualities that get him into and out of trouble in equal measure. But he is a blank – his family is never mentioned, nor are any romantic entanglements, his age is never given and he never gets any older as the 20th century flickers on through the books, the world changing around him. In fact, his only real defining characteristic is his enthusiasm for adventure, a facet of his personality that was replaced with a somewhat weary cynicism in the later volumes.

Far from being a drawback to the character, this is one of his greatest strengths. Tintin is easy for readers to identify with and, as we shall see here, his lack of any political ideology »

DID YOU KNOW?

Herge's name comes from the French pronunciation of his initials – G R – reversed. This naming convention was also used by the Joseph Gillain,

Elements of science fiction are apparent in *Tintin*



THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN

By the time of Herge's death he had produced 23 complete *Tintin* books, with another under way. A further album, *Tintin And The Lake Of Sharks*, was printed in 1972. This was written by Herge's friend Michel "Greg" Regnier, and although Herge supervised the film the strip was based on, he had nothing to do with the book.

The list below includes the original publication dates, mainly in a number of magazines and newspapers. They were all published as collections after their conclusion in periodical form, but most of the early stories were revised numerous times to add colour, remove objectionable material and build continuity. There have been six *Tintin* films made, with Stephen Spielberg and Peter Jackson's upcoming CG motion capture effort the seventh.

1. ***Tintin In The Land Of The Soviets*** (1929-1930)
2. ***Tintin In The Congo*** (1930-1931)
3. ***Tintin In America*** (1932-1934)
4. ***Cigars Of The Pharoah*** (1934-1934)
5. ***The Blue Lotus*** (1934-1935)
6. ***The Broken Ear*** (1935-1937)
7. ***The Black Island*** (1937-1938)
8. ***King Ottokar's Sceptre*** (1938-1939)
9. ***The Crab With The Golden Claws*** (1940-1941)
10. ***The Shooting Star*** (1941)
11. ***The Secret Of The Unicorn*** (1942-1943)
12. ***Red Rackham's Treasure*** (1943-1944)
13. ***The Seven Crystal Balls*** (1943-1948)
14. ***Prisoners Of The Sun*** (1946-1949)
15. ***Land of Black Gold*** (1948-1950)
16. ***Destination Moon*** (1950-1953)
17. ***Explorers On The Moon*** (1954)
18. ***The Calculus Affair*** (1954-1956)
19. ***The Red Sea Sharks*** (1958)
20. ***Tintin in Tibet*** (1960)
21. ***The Castafiore Emerald*** (1963)

The Thompson Twins appeared regularly.

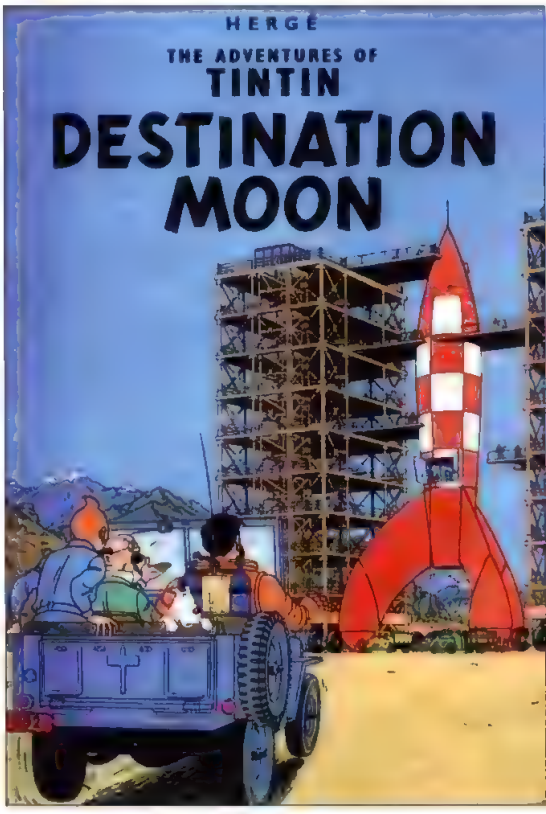
saved Herge from the controversy that surrounded him after World War 2.

Heated debate was never far from Herge's door. His books were criticised for violence, though much of it was depicted bloodlessly. (One particularly gruesome example comes from the original *Tintin In The Congo*, where our squeaky clean hero blows up a rhino by drilling a hole in its back and packing it with dynamite!) Tintin isn't above using guns. There were also accusations of Nazism and racism. Tintin's Congolese adventure is full of African stereotypes, his Soviet escapade depicts the USSR as corrupt and full of death, and during the German occupation of Belgium, while Herge was careful to avoid any direct political statement, the supporting heroes in the books were drawn from Europe's Axis nations.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

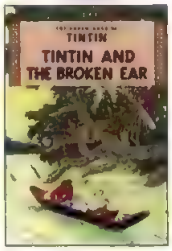
But perhaps this was less to do with Herge's own personality – like Tintin he seemed to be something of a blank, easily influenced by those around him. Initially Herge was very much under the sway of Wallez's opinions – the Abbe had a framed picture of Mussolini on his desk. This, and the prevailing social climate of the time, may explain some of Herge's youthful, un-PC opinions, as Herge himself claimed. It's somewhat unfair to accuse an artist of imperialism and racism at a time of racist ideology and empire, and too much to expect every creative man to be a banner-waving vanguard for universal equality as if all art gives the artist a unique insight into some kind of objective truth (itself subjectively defined by those who are judging).

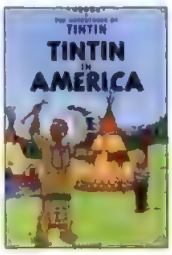
Remember, this was a man whose early work equally bore the imprint of popular culture; *Tintin In America* has Tintin visit the land of the movies – of Red Indians and gangsters – not of reality. And while Tintin's first outing was also criticised for anti-communism,



The most exciting *Tintin* book for young boys!

Tintin like Asterix seems to have visited every corner of the globe





something for which Herge later apologised, ironically much of what he'd written was proven correct. Again he was merely following contemporary Belgian opinion, and that was against Soviet atheism.

Nevertheless, perhaps Herge did bend a little too easily in the direction of the wind; the villain of wartime book *The Shooting Star* was American, and unmistakably Jewish. While his heroes were Germans during the war, afterwards, notably in *Flight 714*, they predictably became villains.

Although Herge's colonial attitudes were moderated as he grew in years and wisdom, accusations of anti-semitism persisted, and he remained attached to the idea of autocratic government, describing democracy as "a disappointment".

Tintin's character was only one key ingredient in the series' success. Herge's devotion to detail was another. *The Blue Lotus* was a turning point in several respects; it was the first adventure to be originally printed in colour, but most importantly it was from then on that Herge began to conduct rigorous research into his stories and built up his famous library of visual reference materials. When Herge announced at the end of *The Cigars Of The Pharaoh* that Tintin was off to China, he was contacted by another clergyman, Reverend Gossett, chaplain to Chinese students at Louvain University. Gossett asked

Tintin's trusty companion Snowy was there at the start

that Tintin not offend the Chinese, and introduced him to Zhang Chongren (also rendered as Chang Chong-jen) with whom Herge developed a lifelong friendship, and upon whom Herge based Tintin's friend Chang. From *The Blue Lotus* onwards, Tintin's adventures showed an increased level of realism, and Herge's views a developing humanism informed by research, not popular opinion and culture.

THE END OF TINTIN

The third key ingredient of *Tintin* was the reporter's supporting cast: Snowy, Captain Haddock, Professor Calculus and the rest. Snowy (Milou in the original) was around from the very beginning, but most of the rest were introduced and developed through the war. The occupation forced Herge away from comment, so he concentrated on developing his characters and comedy. It is Tintin's colourful supporting cast, rather than the boy himself, that provides much of the series' charm.

Herge's art is full of glorious detail

HE WAS ADVISED TO GIVE UP TINTIN, BUT INSTEAD HE FINISHED TINTIN IN TIBET, WHERE TINTIN GOES IN SEARCH OF HIS FRIEND CHANG

The post-war months were not easy on Herge. *Le Petit Vingtième* had been shut down by the Germans, and *Tintin* moved to *Le Soir*, regarded as a mouthpiece for the Reich. He was arrested four times when the occupation ended. Herge insisted he had simply been doing a job like any other. Out of work and out of favour, he spent the next couple of years revising Tintin's early adventures with the help of the artist Edgar P Jacobs. Herge was finally rehabilitated when war hero Raymond Leblanc set up *Tintin* magazine with him. Running at 100,000 copies a week at its height, *Tintin* magazine included behind the scenes material, interviews and short *Tintin* adventures never published elsewhere, as well as additional strips.

The pressure on Herge, coupled with his treatment after the war, proved too much for him, and for the rest of his life he was troubled by nervous exhaustion. Despite the establishment of the Herge studios, which took much of the work away from him (note no-one else ever received acknowledgement, even Jacobs, all the books were simply by 'Herge'), new Tintin adventures became more and more infrequent. His marriage crumbled under infidelity, finally falling apart when he fell in love with Fanny Vlamynck, a young artist in his studio. Herge was troubled with nightmares in which he was confronted with nothing but whiteness. He was advised to give up *Tintin*, but instead he finished *Tintin In Tibet*, where Tintin goes in search of his friend Chang. This seemed to help him work out his issues. The nightmares ceased, and Herge divorced his first wife, Germaine Kieckens, after 45 years, marrying Vlamynck in 1977.

Herge spent much of his later life travelling, visiting America and Taiwan. He re-established contact with Zhang Chongren, whose own life story is as rich as Herge's, in 1981. He died in 1983, leaving his last *Tintin* book unfinished. His request that no other author handle it honoured, *Tintin* magazine ceased publication in 1988, and the Herge Studios was transformed into the Herge Foundation by Fanny, an organisation that defends the honour of the boy reporter to this day. CH

YOU CAN CALL ME AL

Al Ewing is a vital new voice in British comics. He speaks to **Michael Molcher** about how Judge Dredd is funnier than Spider-Man...

Ewing's a writer who's nailed the character of good old Joe Dredd.

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JUDGE DREDD IS THE PET SHOP BOYS OF COMICS...

And from that point, the conversation with Al Ewing takes a turn for the surreal. Which is saying something when every other sentence is a line that wouldn't be out of place in a speech bubble on an old *2000 AD* cover ("No! Not the bees!" etc).

That should come as no surprise – *2000 AD* is in Ewing's blood and if you're not reading his work you're missing out on one of the strongest new voices in British comics; a man with the pop sensibilities of Grant Morrison and the knack for a stone-cold *Judge Dredd* one-liner.

There's no greater proof than the plaudits heaped upon him for his work on *Dredd*, that infamously-difficult-to-nail leviathan of British comics. And in just a few years Ewing has gone from supplying short one-offs such as *Dead Signal* and *Go Machine* to creating enduring series such as wise-cracking ninja story *Tempest* and ever-so-polite zombie space deathfest *Zombo*.

But he's also brought something back that the granddaddy of British comics had been missing for far too long – a healthy dose of humour.

"I'm a big fan of people like Stewart Lee. The kind of humour I like the best is very straight-faced. And that's why I like *Dredd* – it's packed with that sort of stuff.

"Judge Dredd has this reputation for not having any emotions, but he's actually worse than Spider-Man. He's constantly wisecracking!

"That's something I'm very, very fond of and something I try to do; if somebody's not dying horribly on the page then I try to have a couple of jokes in there."

His flair for comedy was evident with Zombo, the zombie who asks politely if he can eat you. The comic was created by artist Henry Flint. *2000 AD* editor Matt Smith brought Ewing in to tighten up Flint's script, and together they created an immediate hit.

"I don't want to make it a farce but at the same time I want to put in a lot of gags. It's possible to do comedy without a laugh track; there are a lot of gags in *Zombo* – bad things happen, but it's funny. He's like one of the lower ranking *Carry On* characters – the first truly British zombie."

The second series, due to appear in *2000 AD* this year, ramps up the laughs with a 'suicide gang' of bored rich kids and an *X-Factor* style competition on a space station orbiting a death planet

"Yeah, what can possibly go wrong? But there's a few more laughs. And a lot of singing. A *lot* of singing. I think there should be a song in every story. I love standing in the shower and thinking how can I pervert the words to 'New York, New York' so they can be sung by an army of zombies."

Whether it's having Robbie Williams diced by a killer Christmas tree or saving the dance floor at comic book conventions, music is Ewing's other big thing. Hence the comparison of the lawman of the future to the flamboyant, high-pitched pop duo.

"I do try to put a lot of pop into the comic. Pop music's probably more emotionally honest, in a way, than something like indie.

"With a good comic book, the readers should be filling in a bit of the emotion themselves, so *Dredd* is the Pet Shop Boys of comics. No, seriously – when they sing there's very little emotion in their voices; it's all buried. With Dredd, he's this boiling mass of sublimated emotion."

But his new 15-part story for *2000 AD*, *Damnation Station*, promises to be a departure – there's little in the way of laughs. Split into smaller stories like *2000 AD* epics of old, his European-tinged 'Foreign Legion in space' series is being divided between artists Simon Davies (*Stone Island, Sinister Dexter*) and Boo Cook (*Elephantmen, Anderson: Psi Division*). Blackmailed into fighting for The Hosts, the alien creatures that 'own' the galaxy, Earth Station One is packed with human fuck-ups whose job it is to stop alien races emigrating to the Milky Way. While the set-up is classic Ewing, don't expect the usual gags: "It's the most serious thing I've done. On the other hand, it's not po-faced or preachy. Nobody's the hero here – the space invaders aren't the heroes, at best they're victims."

2000 AD readers are constantly searching for someone to brand as the successor to *Dredd*'s co-creator, John Wagner. Ewing seems to be their chosen one, and being picked for *SFX*'s '50 hottest' list last year just shows his rise has been noticed.

While Ewing's *Dredd* is faithful to its 33-year backstory, Ewing maintains that Wagner is the character's only authoritative voice. He's also realistic about comparisons to Wagner and fellow *2000 AD* alumnus Alan Moore.

"It's odd," he admits. "I'm certainly not the next Alan Moore and I think calling me the next John Wagner is an insult to John.

"I think where people are getting that idea is that they see my *Dredd* as quite faithful, and I was thrilled and very happy for a short while to see John say that he thought my stuff was very good. And to be given the Christmas *Dredd* is a big responsibility."

That double *Dredd* – with Ewing's work featured in both the Christmas edition of the *Judge Dredd Megazine* and *2000 AD* – was a rare honour and a challenge. Yet it served to highlight his remarkable flexibility; the *Megazine* ran his unsentimental, grim portrait of Dredd's lonely exile in the Cursed Earth, while *2000 AD* got a two-part Christmas comedy, the first half of which was written and drawn in the style of early *Dredd*.

"To be honest, I think people like my work on *Dredd* because I do a pastiche of Wagner – that's how I started, though I think I've got my own voice now. I originally came to it thinking 'What is a good *Dredd*? A good *Dredd* is one in Wagner's voice,' and I'd immerse myself in that without losing my own intonation. I think my voice has improved a lot and I've digested that now; it's passed through my system."

With an ear for snappy dialogue, and a comedy beat, Ewing is now a vastly more mature writer with two hit series under his belt. The seriousness of *Damnation Station* is his next, unexpected, step.

"I'm trying to stretch myself a bit and do something that people will really enjoy. Usually I do stuff that's quite trashy. And I like trashy, I have a deep affection for trash. But I'm trying to do something that's a bit more meaty. Not so much *deep* – that sounds trite – I want something you can tear into. People will love it or hate it; we'll see.

"I'm hoping to not so much get away from the 'person who does the unexpected' but certainly get away from 'The guy who does the crazy shit – look! There's dancing! If I've got a reputation for doing things people don't expect, then that's good." CH

"IF I'VE GOT A REPUTATION FOR DOING THINGS PEOPLE DON'T EXPECT, THEN THAT'S GOOD"

Superhero SUPERGAMES

Matthew Pellet uncovers the greatest comic-based games ever!

10 The Punisher
(2006)

An unspoken law in videogame development states that all superhero games must be a disappointment. Every once in a while, however, there's an exception to the rule. *The Punisher* is one such title, a competent shooter boasting an original Garth Ennis tale, Thomas Jane's voice work and astonishing levels of violence. Infamous punishments include dunking a goon head first into a piranha tank, feeding crims into a wood chipper, dropping somebody into a car crusher and boring through an eye socket with a pillar drill. Search YouTube for '*The Punisher* Uncensored' to find three blood-soaked montages filled with the goriest kills.

You definitely get to do some punishing in this game.

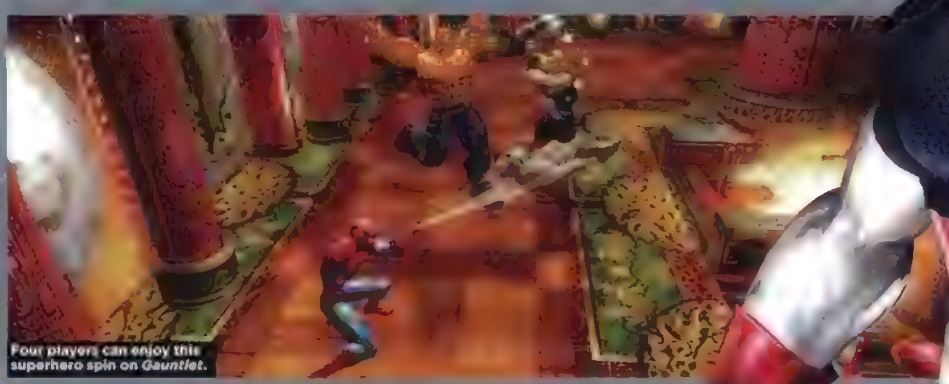
8 Rogue Trooper
(2006)

[redacted] superior to Microsoft's copycat in many areas.

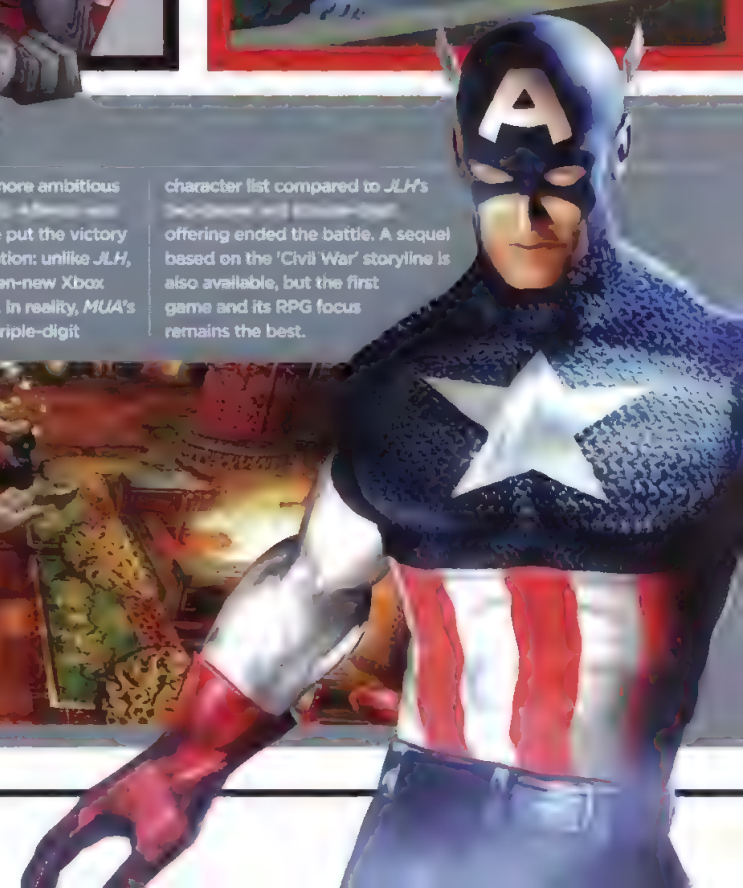
But will we ever see a *Strontium Dog* game, eh?

9 Marvel Ultimate Alliance

In October 2006, *Marvel Heroes* fought head-to-head for Marvel and DC videogame supremacy. Both involved assembling a team of superhero misfits and building up their stats but, thanks to a combination of smarter strategy and more ambitious character list compared to *JLH*'s offering ended the battle. A sequel based on the 'Civil War' storyline is also available, but the first game and its RPG focus remains the best.



Four players can enjoy this superhero spin on *Gauntlet*.



7 X-Men Arcade

(1992)

The oldest game in our list is

Wolverine looks natty in his brown 'n yellow threads.

Who cares about Ryu when you've got the X-Men?

6 Marvel vs Capcom 2

(2000)

In the land of the fighting genre, *Street Fighter* is king. Long before DC heroes were relegated to fighting washed-up *Mortal Kombat* contestants, Marvel's best had been scrapping with Ryu, Ken, M Bison and other Capcom greats such as *Resident Evil*'s Jill Valentine. Huge roster aside, *MvC2* improved upon the *X-Men vs Street Fighter*, *Marvel Super Heroes vs Street Fighter* and original *Marvel vs Capcom* games by introducing three-on-three bouts and by simplifying its controls to help the Marvel fans less familiar with the *Street Fighter* series get to grips with the mechanics.

5 The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction

(2005)

Not to be confused with middling film tie-in *Hulk* (although both games were developed by the same team), *Ultimate Destruction* delivered its two promises – namely 'ultimate' and 'destruction' – in spades. The ultimate tag referred to Hulk's unstoppable force – the green colossus was able to run across any horizontal or vertical surface, barging obstacles out of the way with ease. This feature was later seen in spiritual sequel, *Prototype*. As for Hulk's physical threat, entire buildings could be razed using any of his multiple Devastator attacks.

If only Ang Lee had included this in his film...

4 X-Men Origins: Wolverine

(2009)

Helicopter versus berserker: We know where our money is.

3 The Darkness
(2007)

The Darkness's developers, Starbreeze Studios, became an overnight videogaming legend thanks to a monumentally impressive gaming debut. Developer Starbreeze – the team behind the successful *Chronicles Of Riddick* games – coded a brutally mature first-person shooter that revelled in the comic's lore. Players were asked to stick to the shadows and rip hearts out of dead bodies to feed their tendrils. Light became just as big an enemy as the gun-totting mobsters out for Jackie's blood, forcing players to set up ambushes and observe their prey carefully before attacking. Even though the World War I flashbacks failed to impress as much as the New York City levels, the overall standard means *The Darkness* still sits among the top shooters of the current console cycle.

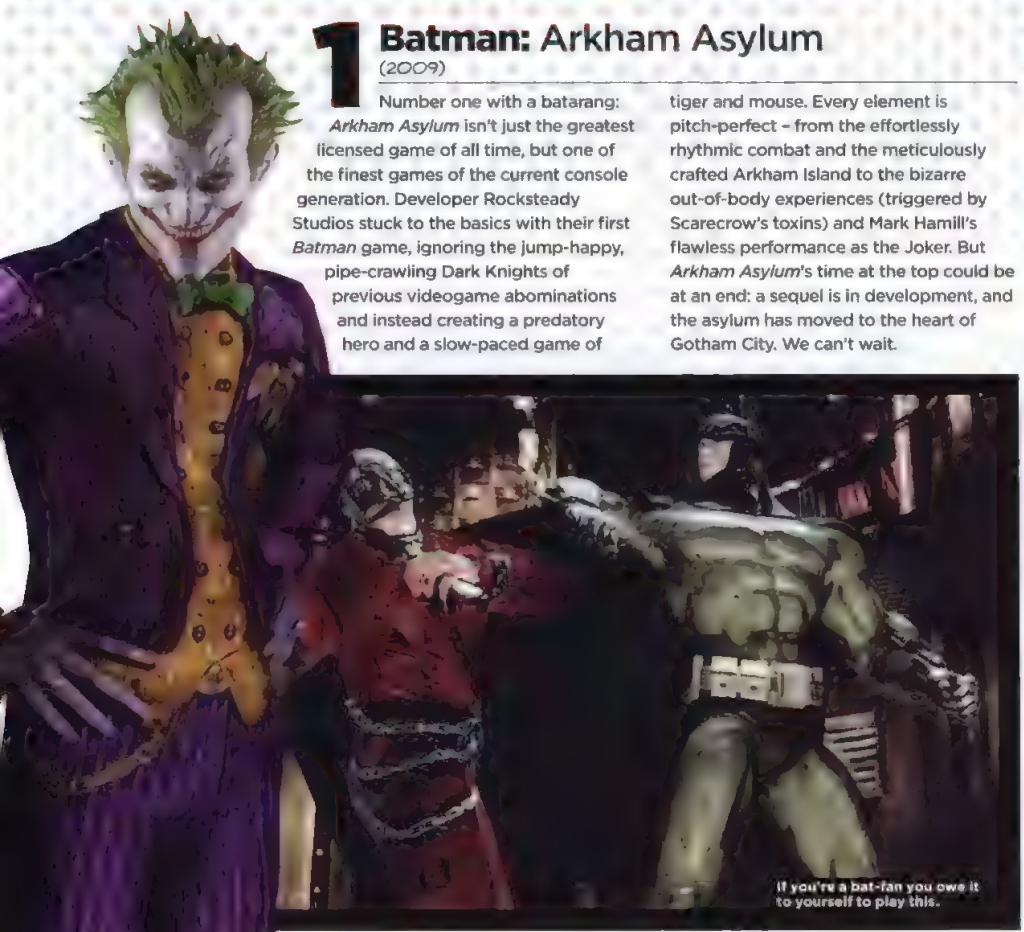
He's not your average superhero, that's for sure.

2 Spider-Man 2
(2004)

The feeling of freedom in *Spider-Man 2* is incredible.

1 Batman: Arkham Asylum
(2009)

Number one with a batarang: *Arkham Asylum* isn't just the greatest licensed game of all time, but one of the finest games of the current console generation. Developer Rocksteady Studios stuck to the basics with their first *Batman* game, ignoring the jump-happy, pipe-crawling Dark Knights of previous videogame abominations and instead creating a predatory hero and a slow-paced game of tiger and mouse. Every element is pitch-perfect – from the effortlessly rhythmic combat and the meticulously crafted Arkham Island to the bizarre out-of-body experiences (triggered by Scarecrow's toxins) and Mark Hamill's flawless performance as the Joker. But *Arkham Asylum*'s time at the top could be at an end: a sequel is in development, and the asylum has moved to the heart of Gotham City. We can't wait.


If you're a bat-fan you owe it to yourself to play this.

OTHER ADAPTATIONS

Comic-based games lacking superheroes

Chris Warner's fiction-melding idea began life as a comic, but *Aliens vs Predator*'s finest hour came not from the pages or the films – you knew that already – but the 1999 PC shooter from Rebellion. A reimagination of the game has just been released but, 11 years later, fails to capture the magic of its forebear.

Another gory comic that enjoyed gaming success is *Turok*, best remembered for the 1998 N64 sequel *Seeds Of Evil*. Again, an updated version, this time released in 2008, only trampled on old memories.

Belgian spy thriller *XIII* received the game treatment back in 2003. The cel-shaded first-person shooter is remembered for its comic styling, including multi-panel screens and descriptive sound bubbles. Sadly, a sequel never emerged.

Seventeen years after their debut, hapless heroes Sam and Max are still going strong. The freelance police duo are currently subjects of a series by TellTale games. Web comic *Penny Arcade*, meanwhile, is two games into its series, although the third instalment is now beginning to look as unlikely as Ang Lee being asked to direct another *Hulk* film.

Finally, special mention must go to *Comix Zone*, an old-skool beat-'em-up starring Sketch Turner as a comic book artist sucked into his fiction.

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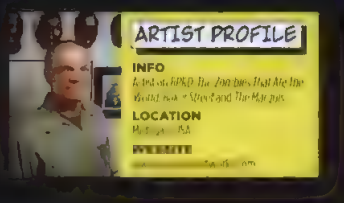
The Zombies That Ate The World

"Jerry's series lets me play with a looser, more cartoony style. This cover was a take on old '50s horror movie posters, with the book's main cast of characters showing that the dead coming back to life isn't anywhere near as horrific as their budding love!"



THE ART OF...
GUY DAVIS

Welcome to the dark world of *BPRD* artist Guy Davis, a place of indescribable horror and many, many tentacles... Michael Molcher penetrates the darkness to talk to the man himself

For such a nice bloke, Guy Davis seems to have a hotline to Hell itself. In the radioactive wastelands of the Cursed Earth from *2000 AD*'s *Judge Dredd*, a giant, pink horror resembling a many-eyed cuttlefish rears its monstrous body from the choking dust – all shell and tentacles, death and destruction... and all from a panel description asking for a 'mountain monster'.

From Cthulhu-like nightmares to invasion forces made up of ancient machines, to achingly tragic beasts such as the wendigo in *BPRD: Killing Ground*, what Guy Davis plucks from his mind is the stuff of slithering, bed-wetting nightmares. With an incredible immediacy, his flowing, organic style is both instinctive and unique – a world away from *Hellboy* creator Mike Mignola's strong lines and deep, heavy shadows. Despite this, it doesn't seem odd that Davis has become the defining artist on spin-off title *BPRD*, which follows agents Abe Sapien and Liz Sherman as they battle against the growing preternatural threat of the venomous frogs. Whereas Mignola's style is very much gothic horror, Davis's is a post-Lovecraftian ode to primal terrors, his incredible talent for creature design producing an illustrated *Paradise Lost* of monsters that unfold from beneath the bed to threaten young dreams.

The nearest possible comparisons of twins Gabriel Bá and Fábio Moon don't really do him justice; their characters are similar in their fragile, sinewy starkness, but Davis's work has something more visceral about it. The key to this unusual style may lie in his home-grown origins as an artist – he's entirely self-taught.

"I don't know, my style evolved over the years as I kept working," he claims. "Early on, I was influenced by Japanimation and Don Bluth. Later, I discovered a lot of European comics by artists like Moebius, Tardi, Schuiten and Loisel around the time I was working on my first creator book, *Baker Street*, which probably influenced the direction of my current style. As far as teaching myself, I just kept drawing and learning from my mistakes – and that's an ongoing process for any artist."

ARTISTIC EVOLUTION

Davis has lived in Michigan all his life, most recently settling down and buying a house near the state capital Lansing, where he he's turned the top floor into his own studio space. Drawing a cartoon for his hometown newspaper was a humble enough beginning, but his ambition to draw comics didn't take him down the usual art school route.

"I only had a normal high school education and whatever art classes they had – nothing fancy at all," he says. "Still life and tracing your hand to make a turkey. I never went to art school or college – I pretty much just fell into doing comics. I was always drawing growing up. When I graduated I started doing some short stories for a local fanzine. That fanzine later became a small press comic company back in 1985, and I just kept drawing until one deadline and one company led to another – and here I am, still drawing away, 25 years later."

It may have been just a 'small press comic company', but although Davis's 1984 tongue-in-cheek space opera 'Quonto Of The Star Corps' for *Fantastic Fanzine* sank without trace, he was one of a raft of Michigan artists uncovered by the magazine, with others including Randy Zimmerman, Vincent Locke and Susan Van Camp. *Fantastic Fanzine* morphed into Arrow Comics, which later became Caliber Comics, with Davis contributing to series such as *The Realm*, *Sinergy*, *Book Of The Tarot* and *Caliber Presents*. It was there that his first creator-owned series, the Harvey Award-nominated *Baker Street*, found a home. The alternative Sherlock Holmes story, in which Victorian England is populated by punks, soon caught the eye of *Grendel* creator Matt Wagner.

"It was *Baker Street*, which Matt Wagner had seen and liked, that got me the opportunity to work with him on *Sandman Mystery Theatre*," says Davis, "which led to other company work for DC and Marvel."

The *Sandman Mystery Theatre* series features dreams of a grisly crime – right up Davis's street, and a major breakthrough for him at a time when *Sandman* and Vertigo's popularity were at their height. As the first artist on the series, it was Davis who defined the look of the Sandman, changing his traditional alter-ego from a square-jawed hero clad in bright colours to a podgy, bespectacled nobody in a drab trench coat – perfect for Vertigo's dour fatalism. »

It led directly onto his work for the critically acclaimed *Starman*, for which he won his first Eisner Award in 1997, *Fantastic Four: Unstable Molecules* in 2003 (for which he received his second) and the Elseworlds tale *Batman: Nevermore* with *Watchmen* editor Len Wein.

"Working on *Sandman Mystery Theatre* with Matt and Steven was great fun!" Davis says. "It definitely opened a lot of doors and got my work to a wider audience than I had with my earlier independent work. But I'm not really a company-style artist, so the *Batman: Nevermore* and *Fantastic Four: Unstable Molecules* books were still more quirky and not their standard core titles – which was fine by me. I've never been a superhero fan, so I enjoyed drawing something different."

Of all the comic series being produced today, the *Hellboy* universe is undoubtedly the one that Davis is best suited to. His style has enough of an other-worldly feel to it to make the horrific seem effortless. But the bureau's agents aren't truly centre stage – Davis's glorious monsters and eastern-style villains give *BPRD* an epic scope that eclipses even Hellboy himself.

THE MASK OF THE MARQUIS

From 'A Plague Of Frogs' to 'The Dead' to 'The Warning', from dogfights between fighter planes and giant bio-electric robots to the cold, blank stare of the ghost of Lobster Johnson, Davis has maintained an incredible consistency in the style of his work over the past few years. Despite his heavy workload, his designs for the series' numerous wraiths and monsters never prove less than stunning. He does, he admits, have a certain knack for rendering evil.

"I'm having a blast getting to draw *BPRD*," he says. "Mike and John's scripts never leave me wishing I was working on something else. I'd known Mike for a while and would call him to catch up and chat. As I remember, I was complaining about not getting to draw the type of stories I wanted to do in work-for-hire jobs, and at the same time he was wanting to spin off *BPRD* from *Hellboy*. So it came together there and I did a one-shot, *BPRD: Dark Waters*, to make sure I wasn't going to screw it up."

Hellboy fans aren't known for being generous with their affections and, for many, if it's not Mignola it's not *Hellboy*. However, Davis's work has not only won him the praise of readers, but also industry accolades – one of his three (count 'em) Eisner Awards was for his work on *BPRD* last year.

"The Eisner was a wonderful surprise!" he says. "When my editor, Scott Allie, called from the awards to tell me I'd won, I thought he was calling to check in on deadlines!

"I'm sure there was some resistance from the fans to having me drawing it instead of Mike," he says. "I would have preferred to have seen Mike draw it myself! But I think fans know that I'm not keeping Mike from drawing it if he wanted to."

Hellish inspiration is also evident in his creator-owned series, *The Marquis*. It's the time of the Inquisition, and Vol de Galle is a former demon-hunter who discovers he can actually see demons. If ever there was a set-up to test Davis's dark visions, this was it.

"*The Marquis* is my second creator-owned series," Davis says. "It's the story of an aged Inquisitor in a fictional 18th century world, who believes he's been blessed by the saints to see into people's souls and hunt escaped devils from Hell. But he's unsure if his visions are a blessing, insanity or something worse."

The Marquis himself is a lovely piece of design – his angular mask, straight out of the Commedia dell'Arte, stands out starkly against Davis's usual flowing backdrops. It shows he's just as adaptable in monochrome as he is when working with colourist Dave Stewart on *BPRD*.

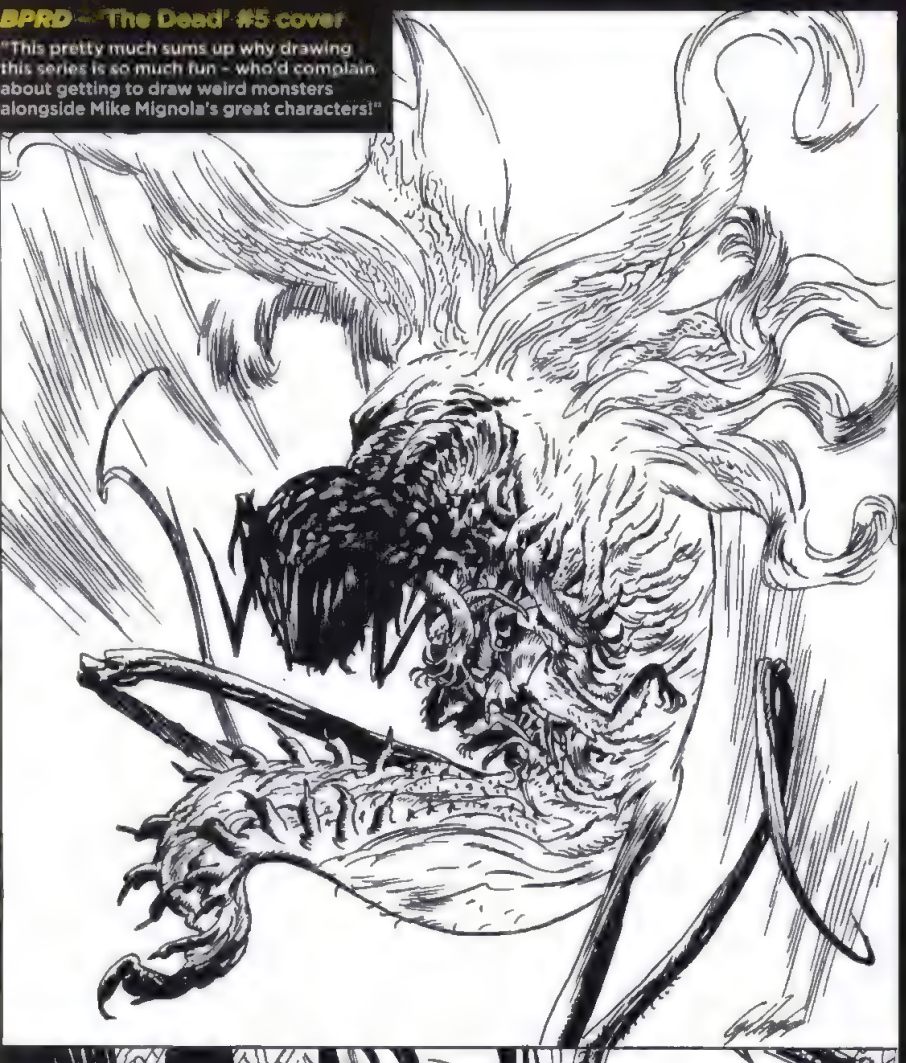
"It basically came about from wanting to draw a lot of elements that I wasn't getting a chance to do in work-for-hire Marvel/DC type jobs. So the 18th century, powdered wigs, devils, snowy landscapes and action/horror all came together with *The Marquis*.

▼ 'The Marquis And The Coachman' – page 7

Used hand-applied shading film for the original *Marquis* stories. I liked how it looked, but having the shading film kept getting harder in these Photoshop days, and finding the extra time to actually use it was even more difficult, so for the new *Marquis* I've left it all digital greys. Dave Stewart, who does the amazing colours on *BPRD*, came in to do the red colours of the flames.

BPRD – The Dead' #5 cover

"This pretty much sums up why drawing this series is so much fun – who'd complain about getting to draw weird monsters alongside Mike Mignola's great characters!"

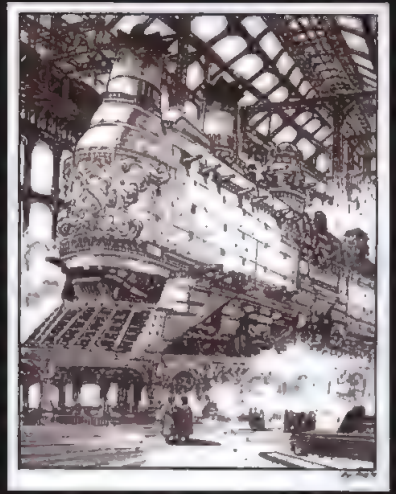


▼ 'How Koshchei Became Deathless' – part 2, page 2

I did this short *Hellboy* backup on the side during 'The Black Goddess' which also had dragons in it. So I was able to design two different styles of dragon for each. The *BPRD* ones were more biological animals and with the Koshchei short I played up the fantasy route.

White Wolf Games – The Train

"I did designs and illustrations for White Wolf Games for a few years – mostly vampires and monsters, but sometimes I'd work on their *Mage* books for something different. I didn't do any initial design work for the train illustration; I just started pencilling the final drawing from an idea I had in my head and came up with this. It never usually works out that easily."



▶ *Pan's Labyrinth* DVD – The Big Bad Wolf

This was used in the *Pan's Labyrinth* Special Edition DVD featurette 'The Power Of Myth'. I did a few other fantasy illustrations, along with a couple of animated comics. They were great fun to do, but the pressure was crazy. I had a quick week or so turnaround and for the work but I was really happy with how it turned out.

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▲ *Judge Dredd* – 'Out Law'

"The series is at Dark Horse now. They just released *Marquis: Inferno*, which collects all the original series into one volume and I'm working on the next graphic novel, *The Marquis And The Midwife*, right now alongside *BPRD*."

Everything Davis does seems to attract plenty of attention. With a tongue firmly planted in its cheek, Jerry Frissen's dark comedy *The Zombies That Ate the World* – about a man in 2064 who becomes a zombie hunter, only to discover that the brain-muchers don't just want to lie down and play dead – has been widely praised for its humour. Originally published in *Métal Hurlant*, it has a looser, more playful feel than his darker work on *BPRD*.

But, if anything, he was born to draw the Cursed Earth. A fan of *2000 AD* as a youngster, Davis has now drawn a one-off *Judge Dredd* story with *Indiana Jones* and *Robocop* writer Rob Williams for an upcoming issue of the *Judge Dredd Megazine*. The usual route for artists is to use *2000 AD* as a way to catch the attention of DC and Marvel in the States, but it's clear that coming the other way represents a labour of love for Davis: "In the '80s when I was just starting out, I used to pick up the old *2000 ADs* (those great newsprint ones) and got hooked on *Judge Dredd* and a lot of the other stories," he says. "I think every artist starting out has a list of characters they want to eventually get to draw in their career, and Judge Dredd was on mine."

As part of John Wagner's epic 'Tour Of Duty' storyline, Dredd is now exiled in the Cursed Earth – an irradiated wilderness already known for its population of dinosaurs, flying rats and weird mutants. So 'Out Law', coloured by his regular *BPRD* cohort Dave Stewart, is the perfect setting for Davis's imagination to run riot.

But where does this imagination come from? What processes does Davis go through to produce these four-colour nightmares? "I wish I had a high-brow 'artist' type answer for this," he admits, "but I just sit down and do the work. I pencil out an entire issue and then get to work inking it.

"The truth is, with any job, I just try to do my best and make the writer's story clear and entertaining on the page – and meet those deadlines while I'm doing it."

***The Marquis And The Midwife* – French cover**

"This is for the upcoming *The Marquis And The Midwife* graphic novel. I like to draw different covers for the US and French editions. The Dark Horse editions are more simple, but for the French version I went down the crazy, cluttered route, with the Marquis duelling the children of the Midwife."

THE MAKING OF... SUPERMAN

Believing a man can fly

Years before the advent of CGI, special effects expert Roy Field helped director Richard Donner realistically launch Christopher Reeve into the skies above Metropolis in the superhero movie that would define the genre for years... By Daniel Etherington

The helicopter teeters precariously on the edge of the roof of a skyscraper, its pilot unconscious and its passenger, reporter Lois Lane, screaming with terror as she slips and dangles hundreds of feet above the sidewalk. Losing her grip, she falls to almost certain death. But then a blur of blue, red and yellow appears – it's a man. A flying man. Superman! He catches her, and says, "Easy, miss. I've got you." To which she replies, both aghast and relieved, "You've got me? Who's got you?" It's not over yet though – the helicopter and its pilot plummet to the ground, but Superman catches them easily in his free hand.

Arguably, it was the 1990s CGI revolution that enabled live action to fully reproduce comic book heroics, with such films as *Spawn* (1997), *X-Men* (2000) and *Spider-Man* (2002). But although many pre-CGI comic book movies and TV shows were disappointing in their lack of superpowered action, 1978's *Superman* was the outstanding exception. Such impressive elements as the famous helicopter sequence were created entirely with traditional, pre-digital special effects techniques, such as front projection and hand-painted mattes. Indeed, *Superman* was one of a cluster of films that exemplified such techniques, and which reached their zenith in the late '70s – think *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters*. These movies retain an edge, even in an era of slick CGI, due to the physicality of their non-digital techniques. However, getting Superman to fly – not to mention support aircraft, throw missiles into space and reverse the rotation of the Earth – was no mean feat. It drew on the skills of several veterans and innovators of the special effects trade, notably Roy Field (see right), Les »

MAIN IMAGE: Was there ever a more iconic big-screen superhero?

BELOW: Gene Hackman's Lex Luthor, complete with wig.

Roy Field

Roy Field was born in 1932 and was a cinematographer specialising in visual effects. He was one of the core team on *Superman* and was involved with the production for nearly three years, from the earliest research and development to the December 1978 release (which was delayed from June).

Field won an Oscar in 1979 for the visual effects on *Superman*, along with Les Bowie (mattes and composites), Colin Chilvers (director of special effects), Derek Meddings (model effects), Denys Coop (process photography) and Zoran Perisic (zoptic special effects).

He went on to work on two more *Superman* films and *Supergirl*. He didn't work on *Superman IV*, though. Why not? "I was working with Jim Henson, so I couldn't care less, I was enjoying myself so much." He called Henson one of his favourite people and worked on three films with him: *The Great Muppet Caper*, *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*.

Field worked on two *Quatermass* films for Hammer, eight *Bond* films and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* for Cubby Broccoli, and vintage sci-fi including *Outland* and *Saturn 3*. He even created effects for such greats as Ray Harryhausen on *Mysterious Island* and *Clash Of The Titans*, and he stepped in to help on *Sinbad and the Eye Of The Tiger* when Harryhausen was ill. One of the great veterans of British special effects, he died in May 2002.

THE MAKING OF...

Bowie (matte painter extraordinaire) and Colin Chilvers (director of special effects) who were all onboard even before director Richard Donner. Shortly before he died in 2002, Field gave an in-depth interview about the production of *Superman*. He referred to this group as "the nucleus" of the production, and their work earned the film its only Oscar.

MAKING A MAN FLY

The nucleus had a major challenge on their hands. "We wanted to maintain a lot of the traditional styles and attitudes and so on that Superman took in the comics," explained Field. "But we had to translate those things into moving images, which isn't as simple as it sounds. It's not easy to make a man fly, frankly. It's an unnatural thing and if it doesn't look good, it looks dreadful – laughable. You're on that point between laughing and reality, and you've got to stay on the side of reality."

In its early pre-production days, the film faced other challenges. Original director Guy Hamilton left *Superman* quite suddenly after the project, which was being produced by the father-and-son team of Alexander and Ilya Salkind for Warner Bros, moved from Italy to the UK. According to Field, Hamilton felt that he wasn't the right man to direct the film, but Tom Mankiewicz, who was brought in "mainly to rethink the storyline", said it was because Hamilton was a tax exile from the UK. However, the project rapidly got into gear with the arrival of replacement director Richard Donner, who had just had a hit with *The Omen*. Field said, "Dick came on board and said, 'Superman is a human and we've got to look at him in reality.'" The bit about Supes being human might not be strictly true, but the notion of placing this comic book hero in a credibly real world would define the film and be the backbone of its success.

"Dick Donner was very good," said Field. "He'd always say, 'Now look, if you guys see something that's absolutely silly, we'll talk about it.'" One example of this was a scene involving an Indian village being flooded. "I went to Dick and said, 'You know, this is going to cost you a fortune and, quite frankly, it's not going to look very good at all.'" A subsequent meeting resulted in "a big pencil through a page in the script. We came up with something else that was a much better idea. That's how a lot of it evolved."

So while Mankiewicz tidied up the script, shortening it and excising its camper aspects, the story was also influenced by the effects men, who worked closely to satisfy Donner's vision of a film where every sequence would not only work realistically, but would fit into a realistic world

At the core of this realism was the small matter of a flying man. Field – who said he'd "done a lot of flying with wires in my previous 25 years" – was tasked with solving this particular

AT THE CORE OF THIS REALISM WAS THE SMALL MATTER OF A FLYING MAN

challenge. And, luckily, the Salkinds seemed to realise the magnitude and significance of this task, giving the effects nucleus several months for research and development – a highly unusual luxury. "I'd never been given a week's R and D before, let alone six months," said Field. The team tried firing Superman mannequins from mortars, using animation, and even employing radio-controlled flying models, but all these methods lacked life. Ultimately, it came back to wire-work alongside front-projection. One innovation was 'zoptics', named after another member of the effects team, inventor Zoran Perisic. This involved the inclusion of zoom lenses in the front projection set-up, enabling the team to create in-camera shots of Superman moving towards or away from the camera.

In the documentary *The Magic Behind The Cape*, Field said, "There were many different techniques used to make Superman fly. But the best special effect of all was Christopher Reeve himself." Reeve was a fairly late bit of casting – the Salkinds had secured funding for the film with the signing of Marlon Brando and Gene Hackman. "We started production

Brando brand

Marlon Brando was the first big name to be signed for *Superman* by the Salkinds. His presence helped secure international funding, while he earned an unprecedented $3.7 million fee and a percentage of the box office gross profits for just two weeks of work. He played Jor-El, the alien scientist who sends his infant son Kal-El – the future Superman – to Earth to prevent him from dying in the destruction of their home planet, Krypton. The Krypton scenes were the first to be shot, and were filmed at Pinewood Studios in 1977. Brando's filming dates were set in stone, so the sudden departure of original director Guy Hamilton from the project "caused a little bit of panic".

In terms of allocations of the film's $55 million budget (a record for the time), Roy Field said the Salkinds "realised the film was basically a special effects film... This is where the money has got to be put." A lot of it went on Brando too, of course.

MAIN IMAGE: Superman in his Fortress of Solitude

BELOW: Lex Luthor deploys the deadly element Kryptonite

BOTTOM: Reeve as Clark Kent, Superman's bumbling alter-ego

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without a Superman," said Field. "Warners were pressing for a known actor, which would probably have been a disaster because all the known actors at the time were a bit over a hill. They were testing unknowns and some of them were pretty dreadful, until

REEVE PROVED TO BE THE CASTING ELEMENT THAT MADE THE PROJECT CLICK

suddenly they found Reeve." Reeve would prove to be the casting element that made the project click. "He wasn't just an actor – he really somehow became the part," said Field. "Chris was a glider pilot. We discovered that he had a natural feel for looking good in the air, which was very important." This became evident in the first major flying scene they shot – the scene in the Fortress Of Solitude, where we first see Reeve as Superman. "That was done at Shepperton Studios and was quite remarkable really because it was a wire shot," said Field. "I'd been experimenting with wires for a long time, with Chris and before him. And we were never sure we could do a long flying scene. So we put Chris up that day and Dick said, 'Well, let's just have go.' I was worried about seeing the wires and all sorts of technical things And we did the shot, and it gelled. We were quite taken by surprise – Chris just looked so natural. He threw his body into this lovely angle at the end of the shot. Dick was so enthralled." It must have been an enormous relief for Donner, who had told Field, "If you guys can't make Superman look believable, we've lost it – we've had it."

BELOW: Superman reverses time and saves Lois Lane

BOTTOM: Christopher Reeve and Margot Kidder enjoy dinner

SOMETHING SPECIAL

Thankfully, Field and the team, under the visionary guidance of Donner, pulled it off. This is clearly evinced by the helicopter scene, which was "done half in New York, half in Pinewood, some on the stage, some at night There's a whole conglomerate of stuff there, and it all gelled together Model shots, matte shots, everything One thing that developed during the shooting was that the helicopter came off the top of the roof; that didn't happen in the original script. It was Dick Donner's idea. 'Double jeopardy', he used to call it."

Despite being 30 years old, the sequence has stood the test of time and arguably looks better than some comparable CGI sequences from today's blockbusters. This was largely due to the combined years of experience of Field, Chilvers and Bowie, along with other core members of the team including production designer John Barry, who was fresh off *Star Wars*, and cinematographer Geoffrey Unsworth. These were people with years of practical experience

What makes a film successful is a magical quality – a synergy. In the case of *Superman*, it was there in spades "There was a buzz about it... everybody knew it was something special, there was no doubt about it." CH

Superman II controversy

The Salkinds' original plan was to film *Superman* and *Superman II* simultaneously, with Richard Donner at the reins on both. However, Donner's perfectionism on the first film meant the production ran over schedule and over budget. Enter Richard Lester, who had just made *The Three Musketeers* for the Salkinds. Roy Field said, "They brought him on as a producer to try to get him to keep Dick Donner in line really and try to get back on schedule." According to Field, the two Dicks "got on all right actually, strangely enough. Dick Lester wouldn't interfere in any way – all he did was make sensible suggestions. There wasn't a sense of him taking over or anything. Richard Donner said, 'If you do that, I'll go straight to the Guild Of Directors in America.' And Richard Lester knew that wasn't a good idea."

There are many variations on the story of Lester taking over directing on *Superman II*, but according to Field, "Dick finished *Superman I* and then the producers decided they didn't want him for *II* because he'd cost them too much money by going over schedule. So Dick just said, 'Fine, I'll go and do something else.'"

The commonly accepted lore is that Donner had already shot nearly three quarters of *Superman II* – material that was recovered for the 'Richard Donner Cut', released on DVD in 2006. However, when we asked Field in 2002 how much of *Superman II* had been shot during the filming of *Superman I*, he said, "Not a lot. There were bits we'd shot but it was not that vast amount. The biggest amount was probably in the offices of the Daily Planet. We got to a point in picture one where they said, 'Right, unless it's absolutely vital, we drop everything for picture two.' So picture two got pushed off the slate."

Futile resistance.

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COMIC HEROES PRESS

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HOW TO... WRITE FOR COMICS

Want to know how the pros got their comic-writing gigs? Then look no further... By Rob Williams

There's never been a better time to be a comics writer. Okay, sales may have dropped away since the industry's early '90s heyday, when Todd McFarlane's *Spider-Man* #1 sold 2.5 million copies, but every third movie at your local cinema currently seems to be a comic adaptation. While classic writers such as Alan Moore have rightfully enjoyed more respect in recent years from Britain's literati, other comic scribes are now being snapped up by Hollywood, thanks to the enormous success the likes of *Iron Man* and *The Dark Knight* have enjoyed simply by staying faithful to their sequential source material. And it's not just superheroes – with more leftfield comics such as *The Losers*, *A History of Violence* and *Scott Pilgrim* being made into movies, the door to major success, and fame and fortune, is open to comics professionals. Of course, first you actually have to become a comics professional.

This is not to imply that comics are simply a route towards movies. For many of today's top writers, making comics is the ultimate goal. A childhood dream come true. It's a vibrant, hugely creative area – the chance to meld together visual storytelling and literature in stories – and no other medium mixes that in quite the same way. If you have a visual story to tell, and you don't have a massive budget or the means to hire a CGI-brandishing film crew, then comics are the perfect outlet. Lots of people want to use that medium to tell their tales – but, as with any area of the entertainment industry, there are many more wannabes than there are jobs.

You just have to attend any comic convention and see the endless, patient lines waiting for portfolio reviews to see that a lot of talented people want to work in comics. And they're artists. A visiting comics editor at a convention will actually look at their work to see if they're worth hiring. But if you're a writer, how do you go about getting an editor to read your story? Most major publishers won't look at unsolicited pitches or scripts and won't hire an unpublished writer. So, it's the old catch 22: how do you get published in the first place if no one will publish you? And how do you know what aspects of your writing you should be working on, so you're of a publishable standard in the first place? (Please don't believe the myth that writers are simply born, which implies that talent's all you need, when there are any number of rules, tricks and structures you can learn to make your writing more solid. Writing is a craft. It can and should be worked on over time.)

So, comics may be the land of opportunity for writers, but how do you actually get in? We asked some of comics' top writers – and a few leading editors – these questions and received so much material that we couldn't fit it all into one feature. Part two will follow next issue and then we'll move onto the artists. But for now... You want to be a comics writer? Start reading.

COMIC HEROES

ROGUES' GALLERY

Say hello to the comic pros who share their wisdom in this feature...

1. Rob Williams
Rob Williams wrote this article. He's also the writer behind the new *RoboCop* series, *Indiana Jones and the Tomb of the Gods*, *Cla$$war*, various *Star Wars* comics and, ooh, loads more.

2. Tony Lee
Tony Lee has written *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* for Marvel, and is writing the ongoing *Doctor Who* series for IDW.

3. Simon Spurrier
Simon (Si) Spurrier is the regular writer of Bleedingcool.com's oh-so-vaguely-comics-related column 'Short 'n Curlies'. He's written *Silver Surfer* and *X-Men* titles for Marvel, *Batman* for DC, *Judge Dredd* for *2000 AD* and is currently working on his second crime novel – a follow-up to 2007's breakout *Contract*. He lives in East London and spends his time sinking into a soupy abyss of despair, self-loathing and robot-porn: all vital ingredients in the traditional pursuit of Being A Writer.

4. Al Ewing
Al Ewing is a regular writer for *2000 AD* and the *Judge Dredd Megazine*, currently writing *Judge Dredd*, *Zombo*, *Damnation Station* and *Tempest*. Ewing has also written short *Hulk* and *Iron Man* pieces for Panini, as well as three pulp novels for Abaddon Books.

5. David Hine
David Hine is a British comic book writer and occasional artist. His major creator-owned work is *Strange Embrace* from Active Images and Image Comics. He's currently working on *Spider-Man Noir* for Marvel, *Detective Comics* for DC, *FVZA* and *Ryder on the Storm* for Radical, *Poison Candy* for Tokyopop and *Elephantmen* for Richard Starkings. Hine also writes *The Bulletproof Coffin*, co-created by artist Shaky Kane, which will be published later this year by Image Comics.

6. Antony Johnston
Antony Johnston is the writer of *Dead Space*, *Wolverine: Prodigal Son* and the *Alex Rider* graphic novels, and creator of *Wasteland*. Antony is currently writing *Daredevil* and *Cold City*.

7. Kieron Gillen
Kieron Gillen came to wider attention with his pop music urban-fantasy comic *Phonogram* for Image Comics. His work for Marvel includes *Thor*, *Dark Avengers: Ares* and *SWORD*. He's currently working on the forthcoming *The Heat*, a Mercury-based science-fiction police action comic.

8. Jeff Mariotte
Jeff Mariotte is an award-winning novelist and comic book writer whose comic titles include *Desperadoes*, *Garrison*, *Fade to Black*, *Zombie Cop*, *Barack Obama: The Comic Book Biography* and many more.

9. Joseph Rybandt
Joseph Rybandt works for publisher Dynamite Entertainment.

10. Matt Smith
Matt Smith is the editor of the multi-award-winning *2000 AD* and the *Judge Dredd Megazine*, and has been The Mighty Tharg's representative on Earth for over a decade.

11. Chris Ryall
Chris Ryall is the publisher and editor-in-chief of IDW Publishing.

12. Dan Abnett
Dan Abnett has written extensively for *2000 AD*, including the two strips he created: *Sinister Dexter* and *Kingdom*. He's currently writing cosmic superhero books for Marvel, including *Nova* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and has just finished a 16-month run on *The Authority* for Wildstorm. Abnett is also the author of 36 novels, including *Triumff* and the bestselling *Gaunt's Ghosts* series.

Also starring!

Andy Diggle, ex-editor of *2000 AD* and writer of *The Losers*, *Hellblazer* and more!
Joshua Ortega, currently penning Wildstorm's *Gears of War*!
Randy Stradley, writer and VP of Dark Horse Comics!

Q HOW DID YOU GET YOUR 'BREAK' IN THE COMICS INDUSTRY AND HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO FINALLY GET PUBLISHED?

In which we learn the disparate routes into the industry, which will hopefully provide those starting out with a few ideas.

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ABOVE: *Judge Dredd* and *2000 AD* have been a breeding ground for British comics talent.

Al Ewing (Judge Dredd, 2000 AD):
I saw the submissions guidelines in *2000 AD* and sent off a 'Terror Tale' – a five-page twist-ending horror story, cousin to the famous 'Future Shocks' format. A few months later, I sent off another, which was rejected, but got Tharg (*2000 AD*'s 'alien' editor) to take a closer look at the first. He suggested some reworking and gave me a couple of tips on how to write, and I managed to get the second draft accepted, so I was published about a year or so after I started trying. That wasn't the opening of a magical door, though – it never is. It took another year of rejections to get published again and I got an awful lot of small press work under my belt before I was getting any kind of regular gigs in *2000 AD*.

Si Spurrier (Silver Surfer, Ghost Rider):
"I'm a bit anti the whole notion of A Big Break. I worry that it's a really unhelpful impression – one which I think a lot of would-be comics writers cling to – that there's this One Significant Hurdle, and as soon as you're over it you've got your foot in the door and it's an »

BELOW: Itching to write a *Ghost Rider* story? Si Spurrier did. Who knows, maybe one day you'll get your chance, too...

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TOP: Tony Lee writes for *Doctor Who*. We're very jealous.

ABOVE LEFT: More *Doctor Who*, of the David Tennant variety.

LEFT: Antony Johnston is currently writing *Daredevil*.

easy ride to fame and fortune. It just doesn't work like that, sadly. There are hurdles every step of the way and the second one is just as high as the first. Higher, sometimes. I know a lot of guys who've landed one gig and then can't understand (in a dozen shades of outrage) why the second one doesn't automatically follow.

Tony Lee (Doctor Who, X-Men): The funniest thing with most people's stories about how they 'broke' into the industry is that a lot of them sound like the person was an overnight success even when they weren't. For example, my first published story was an 11-page strip in a Marvel comic, *X-Men Unlimited* #1. People were shocked – the fact that this unpublished comics writer had a Marvel comic on his first bat out was almost unheard of. But I was published by Marvel when I was 34. I've been a professional writer and journalist for over 20 years now. I worked for pretty much everything, from Radio 4 to TV, newspapers to trade papers to magazines to commercial radio adverts. If I hadn't had 16 years of solid writing experience that I could show the editors, there was no way that I could have got that initial meeting.

Andy Diggle (The Losers, Daredevil): I took a fairly unconventional route into the industry, by getting a job in editorial before I became a writer. I was gearing up to start bombarding *2000 AD* with story ideas when I heard they were looking for an editorial assistant. I got the job and spent four years moving up through the ranks there before I finally jumped ship. I'd never had any ambition to be an editor, but it was fantastic training for a would-be writer – seeing how comics get put together from the inside. Apart from a couple of anonymous Tharg stories, my first published comics work was *Lenny Zero* in the *Megazine*, with art by Jock.

Dan Abnett (The Authority, Nova): My first published comic work was on junior and nursery licensed comic properties at Marvel UK in the late 1980s. I was an editorial assistant and a lot of work like that was farmed out in-house. We're talking the likes of

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Care Bears and *Ghostbusters*. Once I had the confidence, I started to pitch ideas to editors at Marvel US in New York and I also went freelance so I could concentrate on the writing.

David Hine (Detective Comics, X-Men):
I began by self-publishing when I was at art college. I wrote and drew a magazine called *Primal Scream*, with a few contributions from friends, and used the art college printing press to produce the printed copies. I even made the photographic plates and operated the printing press myself, cropped and cable-stitched the finished copies and then distributed it.

ABOVE: Si Spurrier's *Gutsville* is a highly original comic. Read it if you can

BELOW: Rob Williams wrote postmodern superhero tale *Cla$$war* for the publisher Com x

A lot of effort was involved but it gave me a good all-round experience of the process. It took a couple of years after leaving college to get my first strips published in underground comic *Knockabout* and then *2000 AD*. I did a lot of bread-and-butter inking work for Marvel UK as well.

Antony Johnston (Daredevil, Wasteland):
If you date it from when I made my first formal submission to a publisher, then it's about three years. But even that didn't happen until I'd spent maybe a year figuring out what to pitch. My first 'break' was *Frightening Curves*, which was an illustrated novel, not a comic *per se*. It started out as a web thing, then got picked up by a small indie publisher who also did comics, so after *FC*, my first graphic novel was for the same people. That early work was enough to get me a calling card with other, larger indies. Getting some early encouragement and endorsement from Warren Ellis sure didn't hurt.

Jeff Mariotte (Wildcats, Desperadoes):
I was managing a bookstore and hired Jim Lee's wife (not knowing at the time who Jim Lee was). She became my assistant manager and I got to know the family, and they read some of my published work (which at the time consisted of short fiction and journalism). After the company that owned my store shut it down, Jim asked me to work for him as a writer, working initially on what would be the first set of *WildCats* trading cards. I kept bugging people until I got the chance to script a *Union* issue, then a *Gen13* issue. My first original comic story was a Warblade back-up in *WildCats* #9, with art by Travis Charest. Talk about starting at the top.

Kieron Gillen (Thor, Phonogram):
My first professional gig in comics was actually for Games Workshop when it was doing its *Warhammer Monthly* comic. But in terms of a real break, we're talking about *Phonogram*. For the first half of the 00s, I'd been doing small press work, webcomics and an editorial cartoon with Jamie McKelvie ('Save Point' for *Official Playstation 2* magazine). He'd just done a book with Eric Stephenson, Image's Executive Director, now Publisher. Image knew we were working on something, and asked us to pitch. They said yes.

Joshua Ortega (Gears of War, Battlestar Galactica):
My break came from writing and publishing my first novel, *Frequencies*. I was able to do a 40-city book tour for the novel, and that really helped to establish my name and expose people to the work. From there, I had some talks with DC, then met with Top Cow, Dark Horse and Marvel, and Marvel ended up being the first comics publisher to put my work out there (though it's worth noting that DC *did* pay me for some unpublished work). The first published book was *Spider-Man Unlimited* #8, which, ironically, was Joe Hill's first published comic work.

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Q YOU'RE AN UNPUBLISHED WRITER WITH YOUR PITCH/STORY IN HAND AND YOU ATTEND YOUR FIRST COMIC CONVENTION. WHAT SHOULD YOU DO TO GET AN EDITOR TO READ IT?

In which we deal with the important, and unwritten, protocols of getting your properly formatted, spellchecked and, crucially, grammatically correct document in front of the person who may actually hire you – the editor.

Al Ewing: Walk away – and show your pitch to the small press people instead. The fact is that an editor will be much more likely to take you seriously if they have some sort of evidence that you can write. Seeing a finished, lettered, printed comics page will give them an idea of what you're made of, and give you an idea of what needs improving in yourself. And, fortunately, in this country we have a thriving small press scene – you can find an editor willing to publish you in a small press anthology without too much bother, or you can self-publish on a photocopier. Once you've got a few of those under your belt, you'll be infinitely better and stronger as a writer.

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TOP: *2000 AD* still remains the most vital of British comics

TOP RIGHT: More artwork from Rob Williams' *Cla$$war*

MIDDLE: Dirty Frank is another Williams creation for *2000 AD*

Si Spurrier: Just introduce yourself to the editor – nothing more. Don't be sleazy, don't be desperate, don't be a cliché and, above all else, don't give them the pitch. It won't be read. Seriously, put it away. Don't even get it out in the first place. If you're a wannabe writer and your aim is to get into comics by waving sheets of paper in editors' faces, you're already pretty much fucked. The worst you can hope for is that they tell you to pitch it verbally, then and there, on the spot. This – unless you're prepared – is guaranteed to turn you into a gibbering idiot and to reduce your glorious story idea into a stammerfest of uselessness, which is kind of what the editor expects. And secretly enjoys. No, best practice is this: Introduce yourself. Tell them you're a writer with an idea and you're confident they're going to love it. (And that had better be true, by the way, or you're fucked again.) Ask if it's cool for you to post or email them your idea, when the craziness of the convention is all over and done with.

Tony Lee: Sell yourself, not your work. If an editor meets you and gets to know you, your name will be more recognisable to them when they see it on a pitch. They will have a bond with you now that will help you get feedback, be it positive or negative. It'll be easier to speak to them by email, ask for advice and discuss what stories they're actually looking for – that way you can tailor future pitches to their needs. So my suggestions are, firstly, never hassle them on their time off (for instance, at the bar) unless you're buying them a drink – and even then, don't talk shop. When you do introduce yourself at a convention, ask if they have any free time to speak to you over the weekend. *Do not mention the script.* You want this to be a long-term professional relationship, not just 22 pages. Never argue with them if they shoot your idea down and only give them the proposal if they ask.

Andy Diggle: Never, ever pitch stories to editors at conventions. It's the wrong venue for it. Introduce yourself, by all »

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ABOVE: Antony Johnston penned the script for the game and comic of *Dead Space: Extraction*

ABOVE RIGHT: *The Simping Detective*, by Si Spurrier

RIGHT: Dan Abnett's *Sinister Dexter*

means, so they can put a face to your name, but don't pitch them there and then. Put it in writing.

Dan Abnett: Be polite. Be as professional as you can. Have copies of your pitch or samples of your work in neat, clean multiples that you can hand out and leave with people (clearly tagged with your contact details). Don't give anybody too much – don't expect someone to read, on spec, your 880-page graphic novel script. If possible, know your target – don't try to give samples or pitches to an editor or company that has stated it's not soliciting. Similarly, if a company has published submission guidelines, read them and, you know, *stick to them*.

David Hine: The only answer is to get it drawn and lettered. I don't know of any editors who will look at scripts or even pitches from unpublished writers unless they can see how they work with an artist. No editor will wade through a fat script by an unknown writer. If you know someone who can draw, then get them to draw up at least a few scenes and ideally produce an entire comic book. These days, you can easily run off a dozen copies on a home printer to hand out to editors. Even if you don't know an artist personally, it's not hard to track people down on the internet. Artists need scripts to work from and if you're good then an unpublished artist will benefit from interpreting your story. After all, that's how Dave McKean and Neil Gaiman started out.

BELOW: David Hine wrote the manga *Poison Candy*

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Antony Johnston: Don't do it. Maybe ten years ago it might have worked, but these days editors barely have time to read all the pitches they receive from professional writers, let alone newcomers. Editors want to see finished comics from unpublished writers, not pitches. It doesn't have to be huge, or expensive; a ten-page short published on the web will give anyone a good idea of whether or not you can write. Think of it like a band's demo CD.

Jeff Mariotte: You should put it away. It's okay, at a convention, to talk to editors and let them know what you've written (verbally). You can even buy an editor a drink at the hotel bar later in the day. But if you put a piece of paper with words on it in front of an editor at a con and ask him or her to read it, you're making a mistake. If you leave it with an editor, chances are it'll never make it out of the room. The best thing to do? Ask if you can send something in after the editor is back in the office and away from the frenetic paces of the convention floor. Get a business card! And then follow up.

Kelron Gillen: If you're pitching cold, with no reputation... well, you may as well play the lottery. If you're pitching company-owned characters, then it's particularly hard. Even with a brilliant pitch, the status quo you're pitching for may not exist by the time they could even consider publishing it. About your only hope is that the editor is already, in some way, interested in your work – in which case, you need to get on the scene and make yourself known. Don't worry about pitching at the con. Just go to meet people, hang out, have a few drinks and don't be a dick. Especially at British cons, where there's a tradition of everyone drinking in the same place and fewer boundaries between creator and the public, this is easy to do. The sort of people who like to weaponise any form of human interaction call this 'networking'. I just call it being social. My advice would be: don't be a writer pitching. Find an artist and pitch with them.

Joshua Ortega: Get published elsewhere. Have a body of work to back up your writing. The 'humorous' side of me can't avoid these four handy tips: 1) Be male; 2) Be white; 3) Be over 40, or at least over 30; 4) Be a former editor or current publisher.

Q HOW IMPORTANT IS STRUCTURE (FOR EXAMPLE, PLOT ARCS) IN YOUR WRITING?

Where we concentrate on a writing tip, as opposed to how to weasel yourself in the industry door. You know, the important stuff... Here, it's the fact that your story shouldn't be a rambling train of thought, no matter how brilliant you believe it to be. A story needs solid structural foundations.

Al Ewing: I'm pretty terrible at the three-act structure, but I have certain iron rules. I try very hard not to have a scene change in the middle of a page, and I do my best to end pages on a high note and give the reader a reason to keep reading. Occasionally I'll play games with the format and that needs a certain structural awareness. And if there's a gun in act one, it has to be fired by act three. Or rather, if you're going to have a gun fire in act three, make sure it's set up in act one or you've got a *deus ex machina*, and you're only allowed one of those in your life.

Tony Lee: It's the deal-breaker. With a novel you can just start hammering out words and eventually you're done, but with a comic you don't have that luxury. You need to ensure that your right-hand page-turns pop, that your scenes change at a logical point, that your cliffhangers are perfectly timed to hit every 22 pages or so, and that you know how the story ends before you start scripting it. I start a story and I write a synopsis. I then bullet-point the main parts and block that into the amount of issues. I then take each issue and block it out into 22 pages, each with a line of description. Only then do I start scripting. When you're a writer, the script part of the story should be the quickest and easiest, because all of the leg-work has been done.

ABOVE: More *Gutsville* - it's set in the belly of a whale. Fact!

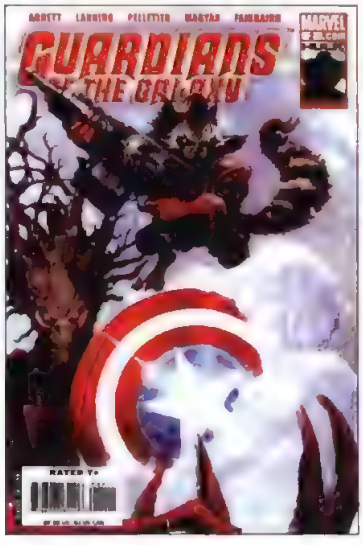
Andy Diggle: The page is structure. The issue is structure. The arc is structure. Structure just means, 'beginning, middle, end'.

Dan Abnett: It's very important, though it depends on the project. Some of my *2000 AD* strips have very strong verbal structures in them – repetitions and variations, and so on. Sometimes I work with an artist to get visual structures in place: particular types of panel shapes or size and particular views.

David Hine: The structure of your story is imperative: there's Setup, Confrontation and Resolution. After that there are all kinds of complexities. As a rule, though, you should know how a story begins and how it ends before you do anything else. That sounds obvious but there are a lot of comics out there that are no more than a lot of 'cool' ideas strung together with no real direction. I always plot out a series in lot of detail and I'll have worked out most of the key scenes for every issue before I start on issue one. When I write an issue, I create a detailed plot breakdown, then decide where the page breaks are. There's nothing worse than getting to page 20 and realising you're only halfway through your story. If the structure is strong, then all the other problems will solve themselves. The characters will evolve in reaction to the events.

Antony Johnston: Structure is everything, but that's because I can't write without an outline, and if I have to choose one over the other, I'll always take plot over character. But that's just me. There are many very successful writers (and happy readers) out there of the opposite opinion, and that's the beauty of fiction.

Jeff Mariotte: It's possible to have plot without structure. It's possible to have a random sequence of events, too, that don't lead anywhere. Neither one is going to make for satisfying reading.



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ABOVE RIGHT: Kieron Gillen's *SWORD* stars members of the X-Men

LEFT: Dan Abnett's *Guardians of the Galaxy* for Marvel

RIGHT: Rob Williams' *Indiana Jones* comic for Dark Horse

© Dark Horse Comics

THE EDITORS SPEAK

There are two sides to any hiring transaction: the person who wants the job and the person capable of giving it (or of informing them that their giant-warrior-ant maxi-series isn't quite what the market is currently looking for). Since much of this feature is about how you go about getting a job from a comics editor, we thought it'd be interesting to go straight to the source: what do they want?

Q Do you hire unpublished people? Is it a case of a writer getting their work published elsewhere and then coming to you?

Randy Stradley, Dark Horse Comics: Since the majority of what I'm editing right now is *Star Wars*, I'm wary of hiring writers who've not yet been published. There's so much about writing comics well that's specific to comics, it's not really possible to tell from a prose outline if a writer understands how to script comics. Still, I have hired a couple of first-timers – but always for short jobs first and usually after extensive discussions with them to get an idea of how they think about comics.

Matt Smith, The Mighty Thargl 2000 AD: Very rarely do I hire people who haven't had work published elsewhere. Al Ewing's first 'Terror Tale' for *2000 AD*, 'Scene of the Crime', was published in 2002 and is a singular case of a script being plucked from the submissions pile, but that's unusual. Usually, writers who get their first work for Tharg come with a background of having worked for other publishers, whether it's in professional comics, journalism or the small press.

Chris Ryall, IDW Publishing: We do publish unpublished people, but it's an admittedly rare and difficult thing for new writers to accomplish. The primary reason for this is that we're of a size where we can make some licensed books work with writers that don't have a long, established track record, but we're not able to 'break' new talent in most cases. And as a publisher competing with Marvel and DC for shelf space, our books really do benefit from the formula of 'licensed title plus familiar creator'. So it does benefit writers to get published by smaller publishers and then work their way up.

Q Artists can put their work in front of an editor and make an immediate impression. What does a writer have to do?

Randy Stradley: Demonstrate that they know the story they're telling. Sum it up completely, yet concisely. I want to assimilate it as quickly as possible. Give me a short synopsis to give me a taste, then a longer outline to flesh out the characters and story. If my first exposure to your story is a ten-page outline or a 30-page script, I'm probably going to drag my feet getting to your samples.

Matt Smith: It can be harder for writers to grab the attention, but putting your script submission in an embossed folder, printed out on laminated pages, doesn't make a blind bit of difference. I'd much rather see a clearly laid out script, and a short and snappy synopsis. In fact, knowing how to lay out a comic script goes a long way towards keeping my attention.

Joseph Rybant: Writers come to us in a variety of ways: they pitch a property we're working on and have a great take, or they're working on other books and we like the work they're doing there, or we have a relationship in some other form or fashion.

Chris Ryall: Show us published work, which does two things: it shows that someone else thought enough of their work to publish it and it also gives us a sample that can be more quickly read than a full script from a new writer.

Q What's the main thing that you look for in a pitch? And how quickly can you tell if someone's work is actually of a publishable quality?

Randy Stradley: I ask that each story/series proposal begins with one or two sentences about each of the following: Plot, Story and Theme. I want to know that the writer understands the difference between the three. The Plot covers the mechanics of what happens – the framework for all of the action. The Story is why what happens in the Plot matters to the characters (and, by extension, to the readers) and how the characters' motivations and desires drive the action of the Plot. And finally, Theme is the point of the story – what the writer is trying say about life, the human condition and so on, with the characters.

Matt Smith: An original and interesting idea is the first thing that grabs you. Something that's initially easy to get your head around but with depth and potential. It's often said that the most enduring *2000 AD* characters can be summed up in a sentence: Judge Dredd – future cop; Strontium Dog – mutant bounty hunter; Rogue Trooper – clone soldier out for revenge; Nemesis the Warlock – alien freedom fighter. If you have to spend a paragraph explaining why the protagonist does what he does, then maybe it's too convoluted. You can tell quite quickly if someone can write – you're looking for a voice, something that's unique to the writer.

Joseph Rybant: When we're working up a property, we have a general idea of our tone and approach, though we always move one way or the other depending on the creative party brought in (writer or artist). Sometimes we ask a writer to pitch cold, not giving them any direction one way or the other, and what we're looking for there is to see if the writer has a strong gasp of the concepts and the voice of the characters... and a good story to get us out there for four or five issues.

Chris Ryall: I look for someone with the ability to communicate the story in a concise manner. As hard as it is to find the time to read new pitches at all, the chances of one being read is dependent on it being short. I think this is a common misconception with new writers, who often feel the need to put everything into an initial pitch. On the contrary, the opposite is true. You want to hook me with your proposal – and you want to make me want to see more. If you can get an editor asking you a follow-up question after they read your proposal – "I'd love to see more, what comes next?" or something – you're that much further along to it actually getting accepted. As to how you can tell if someone is of publishable quality, it's just that ability to convey a story with a page or two at the most that gives me an initial sign of a person's storytelling ability. If they can make me care about a situation, character or storyline in a page, that shows me a lot.

THE PITCH

WANT TO KNOW HOW TO PITCH YOUR STORY TO A PUBLISHER? HERE, **KIERON GILLEN** KINDLY PROVIDES US WITH HIS PITCH TO IMAGE FOR HIS AND ARTIST **JAMIE MCKELVIE**'S SERIES ***PHONOGRAM***...

PHONOGRAM
RUE BRITANNIA
Gillen/McKelvie

"Oh England, my love, you made me look a fool."
– 'All My Life', Blur

CONCEPT: Music is Magic. You know this already. You've known this from the first time a record sent a divine shiver down your spine or when a band changed the way you dressed forever. How does something that's just noises arranged in sequence do that? No-one knows. It's just... magic. Everyone knows that. It's just that some realise that it's more than metaphor. These people, called Phonomancers, use the magical energy of pop music to attempt to satisfy their desires. *Phonogram* describes the drama, conflict and intrigue when these desires diametrically oppose. *Rue Britannia* charts the battle to define the communal memory of the early-nineties guitar-music renaissance known as Britpop. It's fought between a group of Retromancers, who wish to gain eternal youth through entering a streamlined history into nostalgia culture, and a Phonomancer called David Kohl, who needs to keep it true to what really happened to keep his very identity. *Phonogram: Rue Britannia* is a dark urban-fantasy comic. For a movie style high-concept, in terms of approach, imagine *Hellblazer* meets *Blue Monday*.

FORMAT: Six 22-page black-and-white chapters or 'singles'. Each is designed to mimic one of the records cited in the plot. Ideally, we'd also like two pages of supplementary material. One is an editorial page, including communiqes from the creators, bonus material about the period and letters. The second is a one-page 'B-side' comic, which hits another part of the *Phonogram* mythos. From cover to contents, each issue is to feel like the latest single from your new favourite band.

THE CAST

DAVID KOHL: A tall, thin shadow with emo glasses. He became a Phonomancer a decade ago, baptised during the guitar-band revival known as Britpop. His abilities are still rooted there, but he moves in less populist circles as a member of an underground coven of mages. If you asked him about Britpop now, he'd dismiss it with a sneer before abusing his powers to try and seduce your younger sister. He's a bitter, cynical, disagreeable figure with only a little charisma to hold even residual affection. *Rue Britannia* is the story of him realising the importance of his history, making peace with it and realising what he has to do to make amends.
Favourite music: Whatever you haven't heard. Mostly, what he hasn't heard either.

EMILY ASTER: Phonomancer, Kohl's long-time confidant and theoretical coven superior. In *Scooby-Doo* terms, ten years ago she was a self-mutilating Thelma. Now, through an act of will, she's more like Daphne. She dresses in a club-style with dyed hair in an asymmetrical cut. She's bitchy, playful and piercingly intelligent.
Favourite music: Miss Kittin, Dizzee Rascal, Shystie, MIA.

KID-WITH-KNIFE: David Kohl's friend. Utterly non-magical and only vaguely aware of what David does. Tall and athletic, he moves like a soldier but dresses in street-style hoodies. Not as mercurially brilliant as the rest of the cast, but painfully loyal. Called on by Kohl when more physical abilities are required.
Favourite music: Old-skool hip-hop or jungle. Failing that, anything danceable.

BETH: Then: Obsessive fan of pretentious punk-pop band Manic Street Preachers. Now: Mid-twenties housewife who has disowned her past and has long since lost her dreams. One of Kohl's sorta-exes, in that they had a will-they-won't-they affair which was never consummated. However, Kid-With-Knife had a one night stand.
Favourite music: Then: THE MANICS!!!! Now: Nothing.

INDIE DAVE: Imagine Gollum going to a Belle and Sebastian gig. That's Indie Dave. A pallid, chest-sunken man with lank hair and bulbous eyes, dressed only in a pair of jeans. He lives the life of a recluse in a North Yorkshire bedsit. An expert in magic based on memory and a member of the same coven as Kohl.
Favourite music: No favourite music, just stuff that lessens the pain. Momentarily.

THE MYTH: An enormous bear-like man with sad eyes, this legendary Phonomancer is the head of Kohl's coven and has been a mage since punk's year-zero. Was a member of the largest Phonomancer cabal ('The Adversary'), but left to form his own out of disgust at its direction.

Favourite music: Underground indie, Pastels, Sonic Youth, Dexys, riot grrl.

BRITANNIA: Aspect of the Feminine Principle, first active in the 1960s. As prophesied, returned triumphant as Britpop started, before dying again at its close.

RETROMANCERS: Term used to describe any mage who gains energy through tapping nostalgic appreciation of old music. The events of *Rue Britannia* are caused by a group of Retromancers who are attempting to gain control of the Britpop period by stealing Britannia's corpse and using it to redefine everyone's communal memory.

DECEMBER 24TH 2008 12.30PM
YEAH, I KNOW I'M NOT A PHONY... PHONYWHATEVER KOHL IS
BUT I SAID - SIMON, MAN! TEACH ME SOMETHING. I WANNA HAVE A CRACK
HE SAYS
CHOOSE A TRACK. DOESN'T MATTER WHAT IT IS - JUST THAT IT MATTERS TO YOU.
STICK IT ON, AND TURN IT UP.
CLOSE YOUR EYES AND LISTEN. HARD. FOCUS. JUST FEEL THE SONG. LET IT SWEEP OVER YOU. BREATHE IT IN. LET IT POSSESS YOU.
AND WHEN YOU CAN FEEL IT FILLING EVERY SINGLE CELL IN YOUR BODY...
...JUST RIDE IT AS LONG AS YOU CAN.
SOMETHING LIKE THAT, ANYWAY.
AND I'M JUST LAUGHING, YOU KNOW?
THAT'S MAGIC?
WELL...

THE SCRIPT

IT'S ALL WELL AND GOOD TO HAVE AN IDEA OF YOUR STORY AND TO GET IT ALL DOWN IN A PITCH, BUT WHEN IT COMES TO ACTUALLY WRITING THE COMIC, WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? **ANTONY JOHNSTON** SHOWS US WITH A PAGE OF SCRIPT FROM ISSUE 24 OF HIS SERIES **WASTELAND**, WITH ART BY **CHRISTOPHER MITTEN**.

SKOF! SKOF!
SMAK!
YOU... YOU BROKE YOUR CHAINS? JUST LIKE THAT?
JUST LIKE THAT. SHUT UP AND STAY STILL.
BLAM!
THAT KID WITH ALL THE SCARS.
YEAH. LET'S GO.

PANEL 1

As the guard drops to his knees, clutching his throat and trying to get his breath back, Michael picks up the rifle from where it fell...

DOG TRIBE MEMBER 2
Kof *Kof*

PANEL 2

...Then SMACKS the guard in the head with the rifle butt.

SFX
Smak!

PANEL 3

The guard is out cold. Michael turns to Abi and Gerr. Gerr is gobsmacked.

GERR
You... you broke your chains? Just like that?

MICHAEL
Just like that. Shut up and stay still.

PANEL 4

CLOSE ON Abi and Gerr's chained wrists, as Michael holds the rifle barrel against Abi's chains and SHOOTS to break them.

SFX
Blam!

PANEL 5

Abi and Gerr stand up, rubbing their sore wrists. Abi looks off, in the direction Kilian went. But Michael knows there's no time to waste.

ABI
That kid with all the scars...

MICHAEL
Yeah. Let's go.

END OF PART ONE!
COMING SOON IN ISSUE 2 OF COMIC HEROES: DIALOGUE TIPS, THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF PITCHING AND MORE ESSENTIAL ADVICE FROM COMIC EDITORS...

COMIC ICONS

NO.1

JOHN CONSTANTINE

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

He's tricked the devil and saved the world more times than he'd care to count. Not bad for a chain-smoking, alcoholic bastard. Say hello to John Constantine, star of *Hellblazer*. By Jes Bickham

When John Constantine introduced himself to the Swamp Thing in issue 37 of Alan Moore's groundbreaking horror series, a new breed of comic hero was born: "I'm a nasty piece of work, chief. Ask anybody."

Always ready with a smartarsed quip, Constantine's a bastard. He's a con man, a rascal, a magician, a mystic, a blue-collar antihero kicking against the pricks – supernatural or otherwise – a chain-smoking 'psychic detective' who has an alarming penchant for putting those close to him in mortal peril. He's tricked the devil and lived to tell the tale and even thwarted the infernal possession of a British royal (the one with the ears), but always at an appalling cost. He's one of the most complex and fascinating comic creations of the last quarter century.

It's safe to say that when a trenchcoated Constantine swept into the Louisiana bayou looking for an earth elemental that once believed itself to be a man, comics hadn't seen anything quite like him before. Inspired to write a character that looked like the musician Sting, Alan Moore created a thoroughly complex and charismatic character in John Constantine – one who proved that not all heroes are good guys, and one who saved the day through guile, conceit and self-interest, more often than not. Constantine was such a hit – taking *Swamp Thing* on a memorable tour of Stateside spookery in the excellent 'American Gothic' story arc – that in 1988 DC launched his very own series, *Hellblazer*, with the creative team of writer Jamie Delano and artist John Ridgway. The series has run constantly since then, and in 1993 it became the flagship title of DC's then-new Vertigo imprint, a line of comics meant for the mature reader. *Hellblazer*'s dark, horrific subject matter made it the perfect Vertigo title, and it is, to this day, the longest-running Vertigo comic.

It's easy to see why. Constantine is a charmer and a rogue, beholden to no-one and nothing, a thrill-seeker unable to keep his hand out of the fire. He lives on the edge, always ready to confront darkness and deviltry with a grin and a quip. Make no mistake, he's dangerous and manipulative, literally »

ABOVE: Constantine's at his most comfortable in good old London

haunted by the ghosts of the friends who've died in his wake and deeply scarred by his own nature. Take, for example, the formative incident in Newcastle, when a young punk Constantine, cocky to the point of disaster, tried to summon a demon and instead condemned a young girl to damnation in hell. This led to a two-year stay at the Ravenscar mental institution, where Constantine was systematically abused. And yet these tragedies have done nothing to quench his thirst for magic and adventure. He just can't help himself, but even if he consistently endangers those around him, he's on the side of the angels. He's a true original, and, like Batman, one of those rare comic characters who seem to invite continual reinvention while remaining exactly the same. How else to explain the litany of astonishing creative teams that have handled the character over the years? From Delano and Ridgway, to Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon, to Paul Jenkins and Sean Philips, to Warren Ellis and John Higgins and beyond, all the way up to current writer Peter Milligan... Constantine draws talent like a moth to a flame.

Perhaps it's also something to do with the vast mythology and history that's accreted around the character. In 1988, what could be more unusual in comics than a foul-mouthed scouser who dealt with devils and demons – and a working class hero at that? Jamie Delano established Constantine's family and friends, giving him a support network continually drawn into danger by John's destructive nature. There's his sister Cheryl and niece Gemma, his tragic history with his abusive old man, the twin brother he strangled in the womb, good old Chas Chandler (John's cab-driving best friend), Ellie the succubus, the mysterious Map, the beautiful Kit (probably John's greatest love)... Subsequent writers have added considerably to John's world and his history, which has been established over 260 issues of *Hellblazer*, is a deep and detailed thing.

Maybe it's also to do with horror – and politics. Original writer Delano came from the same sardonic, satirical, anti-authoritarian stable as his contemporary Pat Mills (famous for more *2000 AD* strips than you can mention) and he folded supernatural terror and real-life concerns together to create gritty, horrific tales wrapped around a defiantly humanist heart. John's a bastard, yes, but he's one of us, always striving to get one over The Man.

Perhaps a part of us – a tiny part, but a part nonetheless – wants to be him; to be the rogue with one foot in the world of shadow. We don't think it's a stretch to suggest so. But it matters not what dark glamour John Costantine has cast over us – long may he continue to run through the darkness, the hounds of Hell always at his heels.

D C CONSTANTINE SPECIAL AGENT AND I AM NOW IN CHARGE OF THIS SHAMEFUL DISPLAY OF FUCK-WITTERY YOU LOT CALL A SCENE OF CRIME INVESTIGATION
SO, TELL ME ABOUT THE STINK BOMB IN THE GARBAGE CHUTE AND MAKE IT THE SHORT VERSION

ESSENTIAL HELLBLAZER 1

HAUNTED

BY WARREN ELLIS AND JOHN HIGGINS

Warren Ellis's brief run on the book – cut short by DC's refusal to print the story 'Shoot', which dealt with a playground shooting – came out of the gates with 'Haunted', which for our money is one of the best *Hellblazer* tales. An old flame of Constantine's turns up dead, and a very nasty revenge is wreaked. 'Haunted' is brutal stuff – minor key compared to the devils, demons and world-ending peril other *Hellblazer* writers have played with, but no less effective for that: "There's no percentage in being a nasty little prick and pissing off uncle John right now, sunshine," says Constantine, just prior to locking the LSD-dosed bad guy in a box with the remains of the woman he murdered. He's not wrong.

Perhaps most of all, 'Haunted' maps Constantine's relationship with London, his adopted hometown, and it stands comparison with Michael Moorcock's *Mother London* as a powerfully atmospheric evocation of the place. Here, Ellis provides the definitive exploration of the strange relationship between the man and the city: "London's built on ghosts," says Constantine. No wonder he's so at home there.

ESSENTIAL HELLBLAZER 2

ORIGINAL SINS

BY JAMIE DELANO, JOHN RIDGEWAY AND ALFREDO ALCALA

Here's where it all began. Leaping from the pages of *Swamp Thing*, John Constantine earned his own monthly series, which debuted in 1988 and has been running ever since. Northampton-based writer Jamie Delano was the man at the wheel, and his contribution to *Hellblazer* is incalculable. He set the tone for the character and his world, making the showy, shadowy smartass of *Swamp Thing* a real man – one with history, relationships, family... and some very real flaws.

'Original Sins' collects Delano's first nine issues of *Hellblazer*, and everything arrives fully formed in the first story, the horrific 'Hunger': the working-class milieu, the fags and booze, and Constantine living on the edge of his wits. Here we see him haunted by the ghosts of the friends he's betrayed, even as he sells more of them down the river – poor old Gary Lester is sacrificed to stop a hunger demon. But Delano's Constantine is nevertheless charismatic and likeable, the bastard balanced by a humanist streak.

Delano's *Hellblazer* is also a product of its time, a politically motivated beast commenting on Thatcherism and the National Front, using horror as metaphor and mirror. Sometimes this was too overt, resulting in stories such as 'Going For It', a blackly comic but unsubtle story about demonic yuppies. But here, in Delano's early issues (splendidly illustrated by John Ridgway, whose scratchy style is immensely atmospheric), you'll find everything that John Constantine is or ever has been.

ESSENTIAL HELLBLAZER 3

DANGEROUS HABITS

BY GARTH ENNIS AND WILLIAM SIMPSON

You could choose from several Ennis stories here (especially those with art by the incomparable Steve Dillon), but for many this is the definitive *Hellblazer* story – even the disastrous movie *Constantine* had the good sense to adapt 'Dangerous Habits' – and it marked the start of Garth Ennis's trailblazing run on the series, which took everything Delano had established and flung it in wonderful new directions, upping the stakes in every way.

Ennis cooked up an entertaining new supporting cast and a mythology based heavily on Judeo-Christian theology, introducing the First Of The Fallen – Lucifer's predecessor – as the new Big Bad, and he made his mark by killing John Constantine. Well, almost.

Here we get Constantine the con man in rare form, pushed to the edge of desperation by his own frailties; a life of booze and fags has finally caught up with him and he's got terminal lung cancer, hacking up blood and raw tissue. But, as ever with Constantine, it's when the chips are down that he's at his best, and he pulls his fat out of the fire with breathtaking audacity by selling his soul in exchange for the removal of his cancer. The twist is that he sells his soul to each member of Hell's ruling triumvirate; should any one of them claim it, their fragile alliance will fail and Hell will go to war. It's a stroke of brilliance, punctuated hilariously by Constantine giving his infernal saviours the finger and telling them, "Up yours." That's our John.

But here we see a Constantine riven with regret and self-pity; a man facing the end with nothing and no-one; a man who realises how empty his life is, for all that he's done and seen, and who knows

that his selfish soul-selling gambit could have thrown the whole world into chaos. Redemption is a big theme in Ennis's *Hellblazer*, and at the tail end of 'Dangerous Habits', Constantine gets involved with Kit – his old friend Brendan's lover – setting the stage for one of comicdom's most enduring and tragic love affairs. In fact, in 'Dangerous Habits', Ennis sowed the seeds of a plot arc that would come to fruition in his last *Hellblazer* story, 'Rake At The Gates Of Hell' – itself easily as impressive, entertaining and moving a story as this. No mean feat.

ESSENTIAL HELLBLAZER 4

HARD TIME

BY BRIAN AZZARELLO AND RICHARD CORBEN

A controversial choice? Quite possibly. Azzarello – the only American to tackle Constantine so far – took our hero on a road trip through the darker side of America, and made the man more of a shadowy, unknowable trickster than he had been at any time since Alan Moore introduced him in *Swamp Thing*. Azzarello's run divided fans, but contains much of merit, and this first story arc – with art by the legendary Richard Corben – has a cracker of a high concept: it sends John Constantine to prison.

With John framed for murder – a crime that informs the entirety of Azzarello's run – much of the pleasure in 'Hard Time' comes from the subversion and embrace of the 'rules' of prison drama. All the usual convict cliques are here – the wiseguys, the Muslims, the white supremacists and so on – and Constantine manipulates people and events until he's at the top of the food chain, causing a riot and reigning over something like Hell on Earth. It's pretty much TV prison drama *Oz* with a mouthy scouse magician dropped into it, and is just as entertaining as that sounds.

ESSENTIAL HELLBLAZER 5

ALL HIS ENGINES

BY MIKE CAREY AND LEONARDO MANCO

Mike Carey's run on *Hellblazer* contains much that's worthy of praise, but this standalone graphic novel – unconnected to other ongoing storylines – is perhaps the finest distillation of his take on John Constantine. It's essentially the best of Delano and Ennis, all wrapped up in Leonardo Manco's gloriously moody artwork.

Ensnared into doing a demon's dirty work in LA – his good friend Chas's granddaughter being the bait – this is classic Constantine, doing what he does best. In this case, as ever, that involves playing his enemies off against each other in a desperate gamble that has bittersweet results. At the end of the tale, a victorious John says, "That wasn't poker. Poker's a lot more subtle. That was *chicken*."

The key word here is 'classic'. Carey doesn't try to reinvent the wheel with his version of John, but – perhaps because he's a Liverpudlian himself – he truly *gets* the character, and the play John makes in 'All His Engines' (a Milton quote, naturally) is entirely fitting with everything previous writers established with the character. So, while 'All His Engines' may not be as flat-out audacious as 'Dangerous Habits', or as chilling and atmospheric as 'Haunted', it's nearly as satisfying as either.

SPECIAL GUESTS!

Jamie Delano, Garth Ennis, Paul Jenkins, Warren Ellis, Brian Azzarello, Mike Carey, Denise Mina, Andy Diggle and Pete Milligan – these writers have all been the long-term (well, semi-long-term in Ellis's case) custodians of *Hellblazer* and John Constantine. But there have also been numerous guest writers and spin-offs in *Hellblazer*'s 260-odd issues, who've met with varying degrees of success.

Grant Morrison wrote a two-issue story, entitled 'Early Warning' and 'How I Learned to Love the Bomb', which is collected in the *Rare Cuts* trade paperback (originally issues 25 and 26). With its mass psychosis and focus on a nuclear weapons base, it's an '80s-feeling affair, with cracking art by David Lloyd.

Neil Gaiman's single contribution, issue 27's 'Hold Me' (collected in *Neil Gaiman's Midnight Days*, a miscellany of comic one-offs) is a treasure, with art by the incomparable Dave McKean, in which a ghostly tramp isn't as sinister as he seems.

Eddie Campbell (*Alec*, *From Hell*) wrote issues 85-88, in which Constantine heads off around the world thanks to the ghostly Sir Francis Dashwood and ends up in Australia. Campbell is clearly uncomfortable with *Hellblazer*'s horror elements, and provides an unusual and not entirely successfu Constantine adventure.

Lastly, Scottish crime writer Ian Rankin's recent 'Dark Entries' is a self-contained graphic novel under the Vertigo Crime imprint. It has an intriguing premise: Constantine enters a *Big Brother*-style reality TV show – one that's actually broadcast to the denizens of hell. But it's short on surprises and let down by Werther Dell'Edera's spiky, monochrome art.

In addition to all this, various writers have authored *Hellblazer* spin-offs, including Andy Diggle's *Lady Constantine* series, Jamie Delano's own 2025-set *Bad Blood* (featuring an elderly Constantine, reality TV and the heir to the throne), Mat Johnson *Papa Midnite*, John Ney Rieber's *The Trenchcoat Brigade*, Simon Oliver's *Chas: The Knowledge* and Peter Hogan's *Love Street* Constantine himself has also popped up almost everywhere in the DC Universe, most famously helping out Morpheus the dream king in issue three of Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*. He also plays a starring role in another Gaiman series, the four-issue *Books Of Magic*. Phew.

MISSING IN ACTION

Why has Paul Jenkins's run on *Hellblazer* never been collected? It's a mystery. Jenkins wrote the title from issue 84 to 128 and, while his run lacked the flash, bang and sheer punished flesh of Garth Ennis's tenure, it's unfairly overlooked. Most of his issues were illustrated by the terrific Sean Phillips, whose busy, textured line work was entirely different to, but equally as characterful as, say, Steve Dillon's *Hellblazer* art.

While Phillips was unafraid to use elements of Ennis's run – for instance, we saw the now-mortal First Of The Fallen working as a Greek fisherman! – he moved away from the Judeo-Christian elements that came before and focused mainly on exploring explicitly English folklore, taking in the Green Man, King Arthur and even Robin Hood (a hapless man whose fabricated reputation formed the basis of the legend, trapped in the mysterious moving town of Abaton). As such, Jenkins's run has a rewarding flavour all its own, perhaps downplaying the horror in favour of the magical.

Possibly the biggest gripe one can level at Jenkins is his introduction of a new group of old friends for Constantine – survivors from his punk days. This surrogate family, while nicely nuanced and sympathetic, failed to grab readers in the same way as some of Constantine's previous, larger-than-life partners in crime. Jenkins's Constantine could be argued to be stuck kicking against the same political pricks Delano targeted, too. But these are weak sticks to beat Jenkins' run with, and it's criminal that his *Hellblazer* currently exists only in rare back issues. CH

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PLEASE, DREDD – DON'T DO IT! THERE ARE HALF A BILLION PEOPLE IN MY CITY – HALF A BILLION HUMAN BEINGS! YOU CAN'T JUST WIPE THEM OUT WITH THE PUSH OF A BUTTON!
CAN'T I?
HALF MY CITY IS BURNT TO ASH BY EAST-MEG MISSILES – AND YOU'RE BEGGING ME FOR MERCY?
REQUEST DENIED!

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RETROSPECTIVE

JUDGE DREDD: THE APOCALYPSE WAR

It started with an ice cream. It ended with a billion dead, a city obliterated and another reduced almost to ruins. When Judge Dredd went to war, he didn't do it by halves... by Michael Molcher

Tensions always run high in Mega-City One, where citizens are crowded into mile-high tower blocks, each one virtually a city in its own right. So when tempers flare, Block War erupts. Melda Dreep of Dan Tanna Block began it all – incensed at being hit by an ice cream dropped by juves (MC1 parlance for teenagers) from Enid Blyton Block, she demands her block declare war. Her neighbours are only too happy to agree...

Penned by John Wagner and Alan Grant under their pseudonym TB Grover, 'Block Mania' and 'The Apocalypse War' are two of the most revered stories ever to grace the pages of *2000 AD*. Dredd had faced terrible odds before – crossing the Cursed Earth and defeating the alien superfiend Judge Death – but 'The Apocalypse War', first published in 1982, was a new kind of storytelling. Part violent epic, part detective story, readers lapped up 'Block Mania' with no idea that it foreshadowed the wholesale destruction of Mega-City One. In a masterpiece of building tension, the humdrum ice cream incident quickly escalates into all-out chaos and Dredd finds himself surrounded by bloodthirsty citizens in a six-block war. Warning shots are ignored and the judges have to fight their way out, but requests for backup are denied – the whole city is aflame.

By this time, Mick McMahon was already a defining *Dredd* artist, with his 'big boots' style of exaggerated angles and bloated proportions. »

ABOVE: Judge Dredd – a man who doesn't dither around

"PART VIOLENT EPIC AND PART DETECTIVE STORY"

IN A FEW BRIEF HOURS DREDD HAS BONDED MEGA-CITY ONE'S SCATTERED DEFENDERS INTO AN EFFECTIVE RESISTANCE FORCE.
JUDGES AND CITI-DEF UNITS FIGHT TOGETHER IN A HIT-AND-RUN CAMPAIGN. THEIR OBJECTIVE – TO SEVER ALL MEGA-WAY EXITS FROM THE OCCUPIED NORTHERN SECTORS!
STRIKE HARD – STRIKE FAST – GET OUT!
DREDD

increasingly influenced by Italian artist Gino d'Antonio, he poured his heart and soul into 'Block Mania', tens of thousands of people spilling onto the streets in chiaroscuro blocks of black and white. Although slated to draw all nine episodes, the huge crowd scenes Wagner and Grant demanded were time-consuming and, determined to do his best, McMahon fell behind (see 'Double Or Quits', page 113).

ON THE BLOCK

Ron Smith, who filled in most of the remaining episodes, says that he saw direct contemporary parallels between the MC1 block wars and the tensions in British high-rise council estates at the time. "You could see this coming in Britain during the '70s and '80s," he says, "people in tower blocks with nothing to do all day kicking off against each other.

"I liked everything to do with Mega-City One and I was always interested about what happens to people who are surrounded by a mile-high wall. I do see a lot of similarities with the life faced by people in council estates – it was where they'd cleared the East End slums and thrown up these massive tower blocks to house everybody. People had nowhere to go, so those at the top resented those at the bottom. I find that very interesting."

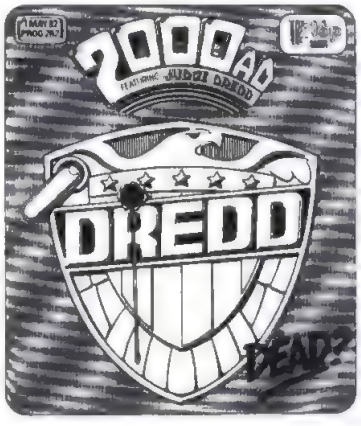
Citizens were soon joined by guerrilla-fighting Citidef (short for citizens' defence) units, which under Smith's hands were kitted out in civil guard uniforms. "I thought of it like the Civil Guard in America, or the Home Guard over here," he explains. "They all had their uniforms and so it made sense to give these blocks the same." However, as the wars spread, Dredd begins to see more malign influences at work.

Since Dredd has a habit of offing lawbreakers, the Russian assassin Orlok is a rarity – a recurring character. As Block Mania ravages the city, an informant tells Dredd that he knows the source of the madness. Battling across the city only to find the man murdered, Dredd discovers stocks of bottled water in the apartment and realises how the Block Mania contagion is spread.

At the city's waterworks, Orlok is found pouring the Block Mania virus into the water supply. Escaping, he then audaciously storms the hovering Weather Control station – creating a contaminated rain shower across the whole of Mega-City One.

Ironically, Brian Bolland – brought in to replace McMahon – struggled to produce work quickly enough. "Losing Brian was actually less of a blow than losing Mike," says Grant. "At the time, Brian was the slowest of all the artists we worked with (also one of the best, of course), so losing him didn't cause too many problems with stories."

It was up to newcomer Steve Dillon, who created a stunningly grounded, gritty Mega-City One. It was only his second time on *Dredd*, but he says he didn't feel the pressure of such a big story: "You might be able to put that down to the fearlessness of youth, as I was only around 20 at the time. It was just fun to get my teeth into one of those big *Dredd* storylines.



ABOVE: Ah, the days of black and white comic art. It's classic stuff alright

RIGHT: The death of Judge Giant caused something of an uproar

BELOW RIGHT: A 1982 copy of *2000 AD*. It's only 16 pence!

BY THE NUMBERS

400 million
Number of Mega City One citizens killed by East Meg One

Four creds
Cost of the freezy-whip that sparked the first block war

3
The number of Total Annihilation Devices it took Dredd to wipe out East Meg One

17 years
The number of years later that Dredd was put on trial for 'war crimes' by East Meg One survivors in 'The Doomsday Scenario'

"I WAS ALWAYS INTERESTED ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE WHO ARE SURROUNDED BY A MILE-HIGH WALL" RON SMITH

ORLOK, THE SINISTER ASSASSIN RESPONSIBLE FOR SPREADING BLOCK MANIA TO MORE THAN THREE QUARTERS OF MEGA-CITY ONE, HAD BEEN PREVENTED FROM INFECTING THE EASTERN AND CENTRAL SECTORS. BUT THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT WAS PAYING A HEAVY PRICE FOR FAILURE TO CAPTURE HIM —
NORTH
SOUTH
BLACK ATLANTIC
GIANT, DEAD — HE'S THE SEVENTH JUDGE TO DIE! THIS IS NO ORDINARY PERP WE'RE DEALING WITH. HE'S WELL-ARMED AND VERY DANGEROUS... AND BENT ON THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY!
DREDD
GIANT
SCRIPT
T B GROVER
ART
STEVE DILLON
LETTERING
S. POTTER

Fallen Giant

In a storyline that dealt with the wholesale slaughter of billions, one of the biggest shocks of the entire epic was still the death of Judge Giant.

Son of black Aeroball legend John 'Giant' Clay, Giant had been Dredd's popular sidekick since Prog 21. But after spotting Orlok in a car-park, Giant is shot in the back by the Russian and Dredd then cradles the body of his dead former rookie.

2000 AD never shies away from killing off popular characters, but the fans didn't like it.

Writer Alan Grant, who had originally supported the idea, was stunned by the reaction: "I never liked the guy much anyway, so I didn't mind too much. But even at the time I remember John remarking that we'd come in for flak from the fans because we killed him off too quickly. In retrospect, we did."

A virtual rookie himself, it was Dillon who drew Giant's demise and, despite the character's importance, he felt it was a natural way for him to go: "I was aware of Giant's place in the scheme of things and felt a bit chuffed that they entrusted me with drawing the death of a major character.

"I think it was deliberately underplayed because, even though Giant was the closest thing that Dredd had to a friend, they were both judges and death came with the territory."

"I THINK IT WAS ME WHO DESIGNED ORLOK, BUT I COULDN'T SWEAR TO IT"

STEVE DILLON

"The three main artists on *Dredd* – Carlos, Mike and Brian – had very distinct and different styles," Dillon continues. "The judges' uniform is such a strong and recognisable design that it can withstand differing stylistic interpretations and still act as the glue that holds it all together – even if the Mega City backdrop looks a bit different from artist to artist. I didn't want to make any radical changes from what had gone before, but, if I felt it looked right to me as I was drawing it, I thought it would probably be okay in terms of continuity."

FACE VALUE

Although technically the first artist to draw him was Smith, it wasn't until Dillon's first episode that we got to see Orlok's face – complete with menacing scar and mocking grin.

"I think it was me who designed Orlok, but I couldn't swear to it,' says Dillon. "John and Alan would have put a brief description in the script of how they saw him but they were never too precious about those sorts of things unless there was a particular reason for a character to look a certain way. With lots of artists working in parallel on a story, things can get a bit confusing."

After battling and capturing Orlok in the pouring rain, even Dredd succumbs to Block Mania. Under interrogation, the Russian laughs mockingly as he reveals the true intent behind his mission – to weaken the city before an all out attack by its eastern rival, East Meg One. The slow-burning 'Block Mania' actually fitted into a wider story arc and was to give way to the all-out horror of 'The Apocalypse War'.

In a coordinated attack, thousands of Soviet nuclear missiles pour across the Atlantic. Unable to cope with the onslaught, defences are breached and, in just a single episode, half of

RIGHT: Chief Judge Griffin has a final moment of clarity

MAIN IMAGE: Judge Souster makes the ultimate sacrifice.

BELOW LEFT: Dredd rides a rocket to Mega-City One's rescue

SOME SMALL TRACE OF HIS OLD SELF MUST REMAIN WITHIN THE TORTURED BRAIN OF CHIEF JUDGE GRIFFIN – FOR THE QUESTION TRIGGERS AN UNEXPECTED RESPONSE
YES... DAMN IT, YOU'RE RIGHT! I'VE BETRAYED MY CITY! I... I DESERVE TO DIE!
ADMEED!
CHIEF JUDGE GRIFFIN, I FIND YOU GUILTY OF TREASON
THE SENTENCE IS DEATH.
DREDD
AAAH!
CUT CUT!
WE'RE TOO LATE
EAST MEG JUDGES POUR IN
YOU FOOL, DREDD! YOU CAN'T ESCAPE!
I DIDN'T EXPECT TO, CREEP!
BUT YOU WON'T USE ME THE SAME WAY YOU USED GRIFFIN–
NEXT PROG...?

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

John Wagner
After a break in the '90s, Dredd's co-creator returned full-time in '94. His graphic novel *A History Of Violence* was made into a film by David Cronenberg

Alan Grant
Wagner's co-writer still writes for *2000 AD* and has worked on *Batman* and *Lobo*

Carlos Ezquerra
Having destroyed Mega City One several times, the Spanish artist continues to draw *Dredd* and *Strontium Dog* for *2000 AD*

Mick McMahon
Also drew *Sláine* and *ABC Warriors* for *2000 AD* and contributed to *Toxic!* in the '90s. Now working on new *Tank Girl*

Brian Bolland
Went to America to work on *Batman*, plus covers for DC

Ron Smith
One of the most popular and prolific *Dredd* artists, now lives in retirement in Surrey

Mega-City One is destroyed. Originally borderless, Dredd's city had expanded exponentially in successive stories until it covered the entire eastern US seaboard – from Canada to the tip of Florida. It had, Wagner and Grant concluded, grown too big. This city of near limitless population was a storytelling albatross, giving far too much scope.

"We sat down to work one day," says Grant, "and John remarked: 'Mega-City One is getting too big. It's getting out of control. We need to chop it down to size.' I said, 'Natural disaster?' John said, 'Nah, I fancy a war.' So war it was!"

"It worked," quips Wagner. "Back then, the violent solution was always the best solution. So what's changed? 'The Day The Law Died' had already covered the destruction of the city scenario – one we tended to overuse, I think."

After the roster of artists for 'Block Mania', Carlos Ezquerra was brought in to draw all 26 episodes of 'The Apocalypse War'. It was a triumphant return for Dredd's co-creator, who hadn't drawn him since creative disagreements in the early days of *2000 AD*.

"It's such a long time ago, but it's one of my favourites," says Ezquerra of 'The Apocalypse War'. "I don't think it was a difficult one to draw as it was a good storyline and once you're into that the drawings come by themselves. It's more than the story – what makes it complicated or difficult to draw is when you can't follow the plot or it's a boring one, and with John's scripts it was never either of those."

APOCALYPSE NOW

And despite having had such a hand in creating Mega-City One, Smith says he was unsentimental about its destruction. "It didn't worry me at all," he says. "By the time it reached that point there wasn't much more you could do with Mega-City One, so there was nothing there that wasn't easy to get rid of."

Masterfully, Wagner and Grant built the story piece by piece – more woe is poured onto Mega-City One with each new stage of the Soviets' 'Operation Apocalypse', headed by War Marshal Kazan.

After the missile strikes, waves of Strato-V hoverships bring troops, tanks and Sentenoid killing machines onto the devastated streets. The judges desperately fight back against the attacks, but their retaliatory missiles disappear into the Sovs' Apocalypse Warp – a device that teleports them

BLYTON FLY-BY'S GONE!
DROKK! IT'S SOUSTER!
ONE BY ONE THE PLUNGING JUDGE SEVERS THE LAST LINKS —
FOR FREEDOM!
FOR JUSTICE!
FOR MEGA-CITY ONE!
GOTTA HAND IT TO SOUSTER, HE SURE KNOWS HOW TO GO!
HE'S DONE ENOUGH!
DAN TANNA JUNCTION IS ON ITS WAY!
IN BOOK TWO: FLIGHT FROM DAN TANNA!

Double Or Quits

We clarify the involvement of the mighty Mick McMahon in 'Block Mania'

"When I came to draw 'Block Mania'," says Mick McMahon, "I couldn't stop myself from wanting to draw every last character in the big crowd scenes, which meant that it was impossible to make a living drawing that strip. So I quit."

Others had to be drafted in – veteran artists Ron Smith and Brian Bolland, and Steve Dillon – to complete 'Block Mania', but a myth has developed that McMahon couldn't cope with the pressures of drawing it. Yet rather than being a failure, that work is his best ever on *Dredd*.

"It had nothing to do with Mike not being able to cope with pressure," says Alan Grant. "It had everything to do with the fact he was being asked to draw thousands of individual citizens in each episode. Mike's work at the time was so detailed, and so lovingly crafted, that he'd have lost money hand over fist by drawing all these folk!

"We were both disappointed by his decision, but understood and respected it – Mike was (and is) a good friend and we'd never pressurise any artist. We'd have preferred to see the whole story handled by one artist, but with *Dredd* that was often an impossible dream. I don't think it made too much difference to the final story to have four artists complete it."

Smith had his own way of dealing with crowds. "I would always draw Dredd first," he says. "He was always in position and talking to whoever – there was bugger all background at that stage until I got that bit out of the way. And then I'd go for what was happening in the background."

to a different dimension, whose Earth is then totally destroyed in a incredible spread by Ezquerra.

Dredd becomes the focus for resistance and the judges' immensely powerful but unstable Stub Guns cut through 'rockcrete' and Sov tank alike as they wage a guerrilla campaign. Meanwhile, Kazan stages a coup by having the members of the Diktatorat killed and assuming total control of the Sov forces. Realising the war can't be won, Dredd assembles a crack *Dirty Dozen*-style team of top judges, captures a Strato-V ship and gains access to a Sov missile silo. When the silo's missiles are primed and aimed at East Meg One, Dredd dismisses the desperate pleas of the Sovs and steps up to the button with a single, curt, merciless line: "The responsibility is mine." Shortly afterwards, East Meg One ceases to exist.

Readers already knew that he could be a hard bastard – the cold execution of collaborators, the mercy killing of irradiated citizens – but Dredd's ruthless resolve was his defining moment, marking him out as a comic book character like no other. As news of the city's destruction reaches them, the Sov Judges free Dredd, who finally executes an unapologetic Kazan. The Sovs unconditionally surrender.

LOCAL HERO

'The Apocalypse War' wasn't the only time Dredd's city has faced oblivion. Here's a list of other times he's saved Mega-City One

The Robot Wars
Dredd faces an uprising by the city's robot servant workforce

The Day The Law Died
Mad Chief Judge Cal takes over the city after brainwashing its judges

Necropolis
Judge Death and his Dark Judges return and begin systematically killing the entire population

Judgement Day
Sabbat the Necromagus re-animates the corpses of the dead and uses them to attack the world's Mega Cities, leading to the deaths of billions of people

Inferno
Escaped rogue judges take over the city and cause massive destruction

The Doomsday Scenario
Crime lord Nero Narcos attempts to take over the city with his army of robots

Helter Skelter
An army of Dredd's greatest foes from alternate dimensions band together, nearly destroying the universe

ABOVE LEFT: Fascist or hero? Judge Dredd is a bit of both

BELOW: It doesn't get more exciting than this Look at the size of those tanks!

> **"NOW AND THEN I PONDER HIS DECISION TO NUKE EAST MEG ONE. LIFE WAS CHEAPER. IT WAS HARDLY ANY DECISION AT ALL TO OBLITERATE 500 MILLION PEOPLE"**
> JOHN WAGNER

SHADES OF GREY

"Now and then I ponder his decision to nuke East Meg One," says Wagner. "Back then he saw things in stark black and white. Life was cheaper. It was hardly any decision at all to obliterate 500 million people. I wonder if he'd have more qualms now. I imagine he would, though he'd still make the same choice.

"For the readers' perception of Dredd, it was quite a defining moment," Wagner continues. "Here was a man who had cold-bloodedly destroyed a Mega City, had no regrets and was still regarded as a hero. A comic hero with a difference.

"Mind you, the story was written during the height of the Cold War. If you'd put the situation to the people of the west, most of us, I think, would have done the same thing. It was a matter of survival. Compare that to the actions of our former PM Tony Blair. In no way was this country threatened, yet Blair did everything in his power to get us into that war, including promulgating outright falsehoods – a war in which he must have known many, many thousands would die – yet he can express no regret for any of his actions. Who is the criminal? The moral hyena? Not Joe Dredd."

"John's experience was invaluable to the story – he was definitely very much in the driving seat," says Grant. "Everything that happens in every *Dredd* story only serves to strengthen Dredd's character. We did strive to show that Mega-City One, or the west, was every bit as callous, ruthless and careless of human life as their East Meg counterparts."

In hindsight, the characters in 'The Apocalypse War' are crude, drawing deeply on western stereotypes of Russia at the time, and it's heavily influenced by traditional war stories – not unsurprising considering Wagner and Ezquerra's previous work on comics such as *Battle Picture Weekly*. The whole epic lacks the more sophisticated plotting of the later 'Necropolis' and the superior storytelling of 'The Pit'.

However, what makes this more than a satire on mutally assured destruction is its no-holds-barred attitude and its sheer scale. Although Mega-City One would face oblivion many times, none matched the shock value and sheer scope of Ezquerra's work.

"Carlos coped brilliantly, as he always does," says Wagner. "It's been wonderful working for so many years with an artist of his unequalled talents. He's made my life so much easier."

"It was a story of its time because the Cold War was still ticking along nicely in the real world," adds Dillon. "Any changes in Dredd's character over the years have been subtle. They've had to be. He is, above all else, a judge and is a constant in an ever-changing, anarchic reality."

POSITIVE RECEPTION

The story is repeatedly named as a fan favourite, something Wagner has never quite understood: "It's not my favourite. I prefer less hysterical stories like 'The Pit' or the current one, 'Tour Of Duty', which is more like soap opera. They're harder to write but there's generally more interesting character interaction. "Something like 'The Apocalypse War', though, would work better on the big screen. That would be something to see."

"One great artist throughout," concludes Grant. "Judge Dredd at his most ruthless. Destruction on a mass scale. Grim humour amidst the carnage. What's not to like?"

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COMIC HEROES

REVIEWS

RATINGS EXPLAINED

Every *Comic Heroes* review is scored out of five stars. Here's what each rating means...

BRILLIANT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
AVERAGE	★★★
PRETTY POOR	★★
RUBBISH!	★

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INSIDE!

KICK-ASS COMIC!

NEW HELLBLAZER!

PLANETARY VOL 4!

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Aaron Johnsen gives a great Kick-Ass.

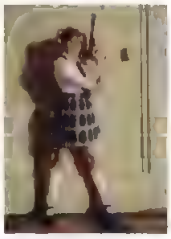
KICK-ASS

15 • 106 mins • 2 April
DIRECTOR: Matthew Vaughn
WRITER: Jane Goldman
CAST: Aaron Johnson, Mark Strong, Christopher Mintz-Plasse, Nicolas Cage, Chloe Moretz
★★★★

Kick-Ass, based on the Marvel Icon comic book series written by Mark Millar and illustrated by John Romita Jr, is about a teenager who decides to make his own superhero costume and try his hand at what Spider-Man and co have been doing in the funnybooks for years. It's finally made it to the big screen with a slightly checkered history (no major studio would bankroll it and the movie had no distributor until the beginning of this year), and director Matthew Vaughn – along with a solid cast – has put together an unusual superhero movie that's packed with energy and passion.

It holds together brilliantly and sports hugely memorable characters. Johnson, as teen geek Dave Lizewski, is a good, likeable lead. Cage, as disgraced former policeman Damon Macready, has taught his daughter everything he knows about guns and weaponry – something she's only too happy to lap up – and they go out onto the streets as Big Daddy and Hit Girl. The pair act as a credible counterpoint to Kick-Ass's well-meaning heroics. Mintz-Plasse as gangster's son Chris D'Amico, who becomes conflicted hero the Red Mist, offers a further contrast to the more naive Kick-Ass (Lizewski's chosen superhero handle) and proves that he's capable of much more than just teen romcoms.

Kick-Ass contains enough of the classic superhero archetypes to satisfy fans of the form and creates a new hero for the 21st century, while also including some of the more mundane teenage problems, such as fitting in at school and finding a girlfriend. Very violent and very funny, *Kick-Ass* is a contemporary superhero film with a tone that's all its own. **Joel Meadows**



ABOVE: Hit Girl!

Dave Lizewski's in the middle. Yup.

© 2010 Com.x. All images

FORTY-FIVE

WRITER: Andi Ewington
ARTISTS: Absolutely loads, including Charlie Adlard, Trevor Hairsine, John Higgins, Frazer Irving, Gary Erskine and Jock
PUBLISHER: Com.x
PRICE: £11.99
OUT: Now
★★★½

Forty-five isn't quite what we'd call a comic, but it's certainly a graphic novel – almost literally. It's presented as a series of one-page text interviews with superheroes, each illustrated by a different artist.

It's a cracking idea, which draws together a dazzling array of talent, and thankfully the content itself lives up to the premise. Concerned everyman James Stanley is about to become father to a baby boy, and in his world, superheroes are real. Wondering what it will mean for his child if he's born with the ability-bestowing 'Super-S' gene, he proceeds to talk 45 metahumans in a bid to better understand what may lie in store for his son.

What follows is a trawl through every conceivable aspect of superhero culture, from commercially-sponsored crime-fighting to a council estate mother dealing with the problematic offspring of a superheroic one-night stand. Ewington has great, imaginative fun with his concept, putting his heroes and villains in a believable social context and spotlighting all the problems that might ensue, were these people real. Not everything works – some of the dialogue doesn't ring true, there are many unfortunate typos and a few pieces of art disappoint – but with the sheer variety and breadth of imagination on display, *Forty-five* is an unusual and rewarding read.

Jes Bickham

Forty-five is available as a graphic novel.

BELOW: The legendary John Higgins contributes

ROUGH JUSTICE: The DC Comics Sketches Of Alex Ross

WRITERS: Chip Kidd and Alex Ross
ARTIST: Alex Ross
PUBLISHER: Titan
PRICE: £19.99
OUT: 26 March
★★★★½

There's simply no getting away from Alex Ross. His stunning, photorealistic art style, so memorably showcased in classic comics such as *Marvels* and *Kingdom Come*, is perennially popular. So much so, in fact, that *Comics Buyer's Guide* removed the Favourite Painter category from its fan awards because Ross completely dominated it, year in and year out. He's so ubiquitous that you half suspect that *Rough Justice*, being a collection of his sketches rather than his polished, full-colour work, is a rummage through his metaphorical bins to eke a bit more cash from his name.

It's nothing of the sort, of course. In fact, *Rough Justice*, in compiling a bewildering variety of Ross's preliminary art, only serves to highlight the man's astonishing line work. That many of the pieces are messy pencil sketches just adds to the effect; here we see the hard graft behind the gleaming finished product, and it's clear that Ross's mastery of the human form remains unparalleled. What's missing are any of the reference photos he uses, which might have shed further light on his process, but that's a (very) minor detail, and Ross provides annotations for much of the work present here, which offer the occasional interesting nugget of info.

You'll probably need to like Batman, Superman and the rest a lot to get the most out of *Rough Justice*, because it showcases Ross's DC work, but this is something of a treasure trove nonetheless, if necessarily monochrome for the most part.

Jes Bickham

More evidence of Ross' mastery.

The wraparound cover for the final issue.

DC Comics & Image

PLANETARY VOLUME 4

WRITER: Warren Ellis
ARTIST: John Cassaday
PUBLISHER: Wildstorm/Titan
PRICE: £18.99 (HB)
OUT: 23 April
★★★★½

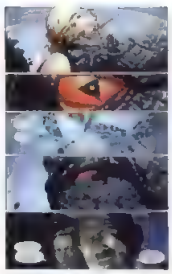
Subjected to years-long delays due to ill health on the part of writer Warren Ellis, *Planetary* is finally collected and complete – and the wait was worth it. While it has taken, unbelievably, a decade for the 27 issues that constitute the entirety of *Planetary* to arrive, Ellis's exploration of the superhero sub-genre may just be his finest work – which is no mean feat given that he's also the man behind *Transmetropolitan*.

This is Jacob Greene. He's not a happy man.

Planetary does two things, and does them brilliantly. Firstly, it creates and presents a hidden history for its world that's informed by our own pulp fiction. So we get analogues of Superman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, Doc Savage, John Constantine, the Incredible Hulk, Tarzan, the Lone Ranger, James Bond and many more. All are real in *Planetary*'s world, yet twisted through its lens, and certain fictional characters – including Dracula, Sherlock Holmes and Carnacki the Ghost-Finder – exist in *Planetary* history. Half the wonder of the series is in identifying these transfigured counterparts – a little like Alan Moore's *League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*

Secondly, the story and mystery that Ellis and art superstar John Cassaday have created is a joy unto itself. The Planetary organisation, 'archaeologists of the impossible', is dedicated to uncovering the secret history of its world – its hidden heroes and wonders, long suppressed by the sinister group The Four, (themselves an inverted and malign reflection of Marvel's Fantastic Four). Each issue of *Planetary*, dedicated to a particular genre trope, is a joy to savour, and the overarching mysteries are beautifully played.

This fourth *Planetary* volume collects the final nine issues of the series, and is concerned mostly with Planetary leader Elijah Snow's now-in-motion plans to destroy the Four. Along the way, we finally meet Four pilot Jacob Greene, the hideous Thing analogue, who's stranded upon a massive spaceborne object that's home to a dead representation of Galactus. So large and so old is it that an entire ecosystem has evolved there, with primitive human life living on the body of the world-eater himself. We also get the secret origin of the Drummer, the truth behind the Four's transformation and, in the glorious coda, Elijah's rescue of presumed-dead team-mate Ambrose Chase


ABOVE: John Cassaday's art continues to shine

It's masterful storytelling that only falters in comparison to what's gone before in Snow's final showdown with the Four. Given the long, fearful, dramatic build-up to this event – and the Four's terrifying reputation – it's curiously anti-climactic, with Snow besting Four leader Randall Dowling with ease. Cassady's usually-glorious art seems a little rushed here, too; but it's a small complaint, because this collection gives us a terrific end to a magical series, one that answers most of its own mysteries and offers a rollicking read. Some things remain tantalisingly untold – such as the identity of the missing 'fictionaut' – but that only adds to *Planetary*'s allure.

Harvey Pekar once famously said, "You can do anything with words and pictures." Here, Warren Ellis proves that to be true with some of the finest comic work we've ever read

Jes Bickham

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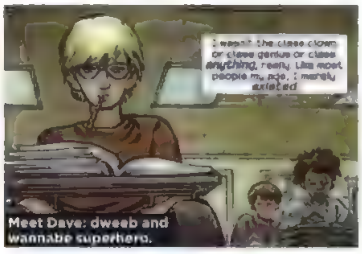
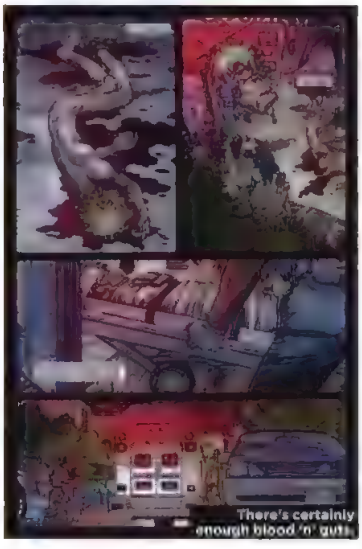

I wasn't the class clown or class genius or class anything, really. Like most people in, age, I mainly existed
Meet Dave: dweeb and wannabe superhero.



KICK-ASS

WRITER: Mark Millar
ARTIST: John Romita Jr
PUBLISHER: Icon/Titan Books
PRICE: £9.99
OUT: Now
★★½ ☆ ☆

Fine-tuning the ultraviolent 'asshole' fantasies of Mark Millar's 2003-2005 series *Wanted*, *Kick-Ass* demonstrates the Scottish writer's talent for nailing his readership and giving us exactly what we want. There are no frills with this kind of thing. Published as a limited series last year (with the film due in April and reviewed over on page 117), the book collects the first stage of teenager Dave Lizewski's experiments in superheroics. The ending suggests that there'll be plenty more.

Growing up in the relatively clean streets of Rudy Giuliani's New York, Lizewski is consumed, to the exclusion of all else, by a sense of his own averageness. He's basically the teenage version of Wesley Gibson from *Wanted*, only with no secret society of assassins to join and a rabid interest in comics. So he decides to do what no one else is doing and go it alone. In a handmade one-piece, plus mask, he takes to the suddenly mean streets, where no amount of physical trauma (and hospitalisation) can stop him.

ABOVE: The life of a teen vigilante is a lonely one

The violence is extraordinary – not in its realism or its inventiveness particularly, but more in the sheer mass of it. Although Lizewski narrates, scant attention is paid to his psychology (to the extent that key decisions are made without the reader really getting a reason why) and the narrative pretty much whizzes by until the fights, when we're rewarded with about four spreads of punchy gore. Perfectly normal for a comic, you think, but these are only kids, and artist John Romita Jr makes sure that the blood is gloopy – and plentiful.

With references to the Newsarama boards, Joss Whedon's *X-Men* and the disappointments of *Heroes*, plus gleeful non-politic stuff about "homos" and "fucked-up prick" democrats, *Kick-Ass* is so plugged in, it's already dated. Romita's art nicely captures the nubbly, ungainly Lizewski and his repeat humiliations, but *Kick-Ass* is a chronically inconsistent comic. It's torn between indulging Lizewski's macho vigilante expectations and, essentially, kicking him in the balls. If it managed to do both at the same time, it would be Mark Millar's *Watchmen*. But ultimately it's just as glib as Dave Lizewski, an asshole in his costume and an asshole out of it. He's as simple as that.

Thom Hutchinson

TANK GIRL: Skidmarks

WRITER: Alan Martin
ARTIST: Rufus Dayglo
PUBLISHER: Titan Books
PRICE: £10.99
OUT: Now
★★★½ ☆

Skidmarks originally ran in *Judge Dredd Megazine*, and sudden, weekly bursts is probably how *Tank Girl* is best-placed. Read in one sitting, the series is as draining as you'd expect if you've any familarity with this promiscuous, booze-sodden, hardware-loving punk.

This is exactly as it should be. *Tank Girl* is still written by Alan Martin, after all, and new artist Rufus Dayglo looks great in Jamie Hewlett's shoes. This time, the deranged Barney is comatose, thanks to a skateboard accident involving Dee Dee Ramone. The cost of surgery being a prohibitive $20 billion, Tank Girl enrols herself and Booga in the Watermelon Run, a deadly race between the coasts of *Mad Max*-era Australia. On the way, Booga gets a girlfriend, Jet Girl and Dee Dee join the race, and a long flashback tells us all we ever wanted to know about Tank Girl's schooldays.

Tank Girl is now 22 years old. By then, most punks would be advertising butter or insurance on the telly, but 'selling out' isn't in Tank Girl's vocabulary. She's as filthy as ever, and *Skidmarks* should do nothing but please her long-term followers. The only shame with the story is the new colouring, which occasionally seems sludgy and tends to blur the clarity of Martin and Dayglo's studied mayhem.

Thom Hutchinson

Welcome back, Tank Girl.

Jock outdoes himself on art duties here.

LONDON DOCKLANDS. ANOTHER CHILLY DAWN IN THE LONG WAR ON TERROR AND AN EARLY FLIGHT ABOUT TO COOPERATE WARRIORS BY MY WINDOW INTO CITY AIRPORT.
LUDICROUS. BUT I CATCH MY BREATH UNTIL IT'S GENTLY PASSED.
CYNICISM OFFERS NO IMMUNITY FROM IMAGINATION. THE VORTEX OF HELPLESS SUCKS US ALL IN.
HOWEVER HARD WE FIGHT.
Jamie Delano's story is rooted in politics.

© DC Comics x3 images

An older, possibly wiser Constantine.

HELLBLAZER: PANDEMONIUM

WRITER: Jamie Delano
ARTIST: Jock
PUBLISHER: Vertigo/Titan Books
PRICE: £16.99
OUT: 26 March
★★★★½

And so Jamie Delano, who first brought Constantine to morally ambiguous life when his comic *Hellblazer* launched back in 1988, returns to write a new adventure for our hero in a standalone graphic novel... and it's a cracker.

The premise is as political as any Delano has cooked up for *Hellblazer*, reflecting the tenor of our times with the bite we've come to expect: here, our blue-collar mystic is drafted by the UK government to deal with a demonically possessed insurgent over in Iraq. The sight of Constantine standing in the desert heat, complete with trenchcoat, chain-smoking and playing head-trip power games with his military escort, is surely one of the most incongruous that's been seen in the history of *Hellblazer*. And yet it all makes perfect sense.

As ever, those with power are abusing it, digging up dirt on Constantine and using a female Iraqi agent and a bomb in the British Museum to persuade him, forcibly, to aid them. (It's a dangerous game to play, and, as you'd expect, Constantine makes them pay for it at the story's end.) While the government has changed (at least in appearance), Constantine has not, and Delano once again wriggles into his head with chilling precision. Constantine's one of the few comic characters to age, and here we get a fiftysomething rogue who's well aware of the weight of years: "Wondering if a man ever grows too old to take pleasure in cheap thrills?" he muses at one point – and the answer, of course, is no.

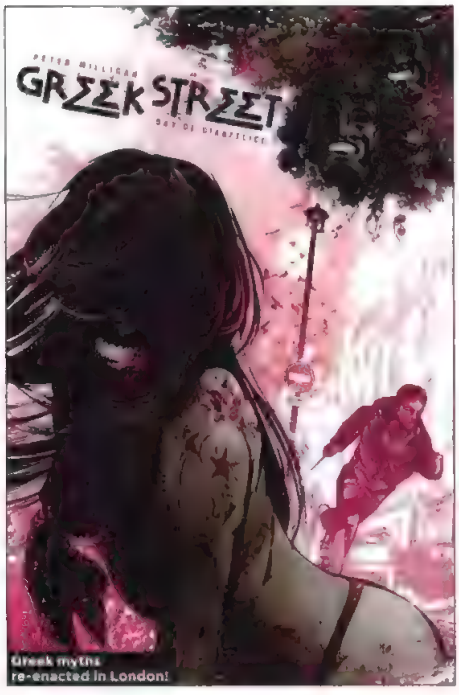
This is an unusual *Hellblazer* tale, on the face of it taking Constantine right out of his comfort zone, but – as with Peter Milligan's current 'India' storyline on the *Hellblazer* monthly – it's not really geography that counts with John Constantine. Customs and cultures may change but, as superbly illustrated in *Pandemonium*'s climactic, infernal poker game, it's not the rules that matter so much as the person (or demon) behind them. It's all bluff and counter-bluff, and Constantine, in rare form, is one step ahead of the game, relying not so much on magic as he does intuition, manipulation and the sharp end of his wits.

Pandemonium is a horrific treat, as much an intimate character study of comicdom's most enduring anti-hero as it is a compelling tale of horror and politics. It's full of choice dialogue and telling lines: "You are very cruel, John Constantine," says the Iraqi agent Aseera. "Yeah, I know. But only to be kind," he replies. Delano's at the top of his game, and he's matched by artist Jock, who here echoes the angular, stylised linework of Bill Sienkiewicz and Sean Phillips' expressive, noir-tinged style – all blacks, angles and shadow.

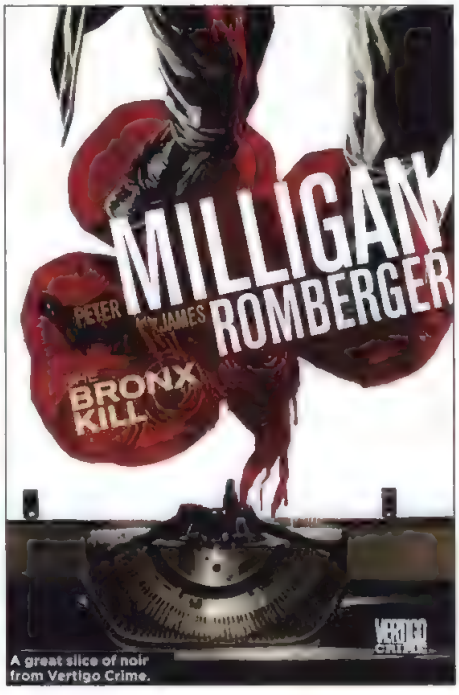
Hellblazer is a comic that's had more than its fair share of classic stories over the years, and *Pandemonium* can hold its head high with most of them. Let's hope Delano returns to John Constantine again, and soon.

Jes Bickham

DC Comics x2 images



Greek myths re-enacted in London!



A great slice of noir from Vertigo Crime.

DEATH IN SOHO, BLOOD IN THE BRONX

GREEK STREET
Volume 1: Blood Calls for Blood

WRITER: Peter Milligan
ARTIST: Davide Gianfelice
PUBLISHER: Vertigo/Titan Books
PRICE: £7.99
OUT: 28 May
★★★☆☆

THE BRONX KILL

WRITER: Peter Milligan
ARTIST: James Romberger
PUBLISHER: Vertigo Crime
PRICE: £14.99
OUT: 23 April
★★★½☆

The Irish flank of the now-celebrated 'British Invasion' of the late '80s/early '90s, Peter Milligan is probably best known for the 70-part *Shade, the Changing Man*, which turned Steve Ditko's original strip into a distinctly adult experiment in surrealism – and then led to the creation of DC's Vertigo imprint.

Milligan has since been an unstoppable one-man industry, and his newest work for Vertigo, called *Greek Street*, continues to pedal the slightly anarchic approach to storytelling that characterised the best of the Invasion. A re-telling of assorted Ancient Greek tragedy (most obviously *Oedipus the King* and *Medea*), you might expect a certain classical rigour from a story such as this, but Milligan's approach is to fuse all the Hellenic violence and incest with the more sordid end of the crime genre. The results are a little bit wild, a little bit breathless: it begins *in media res* and then rockets along. A stripper plays Greek chorus and occasionally chips in with a valuable précis.

Set in 21st century Soho, Milligan's continuing saga follows a bewilderingly large cast, who are all doing something impressively illegal. The barely literate Eddie has slept with and accidentally killed his estranged mother. A deadly, ember-eyed nude is stalking the streets of London, and the Fureys, an Irish crime family, are trapped in a cycle of vengeance with the rival Limms, who control Chinatown.

Blood Calls for Blood collects the first five issues of Greek Street, but it isn't clear why Milligan has structured his story into arcs like this; little is resolved by the end of the book, although the journey is compelling. Davide Gianfelice's art is great at giving the world a kind of corrupted frowziness, but he doesn't do enough to distinguish the strikingly similar-looking characters.

Graphic novel *The Bronx Kill*, also by Milligan, is a much more traditional crime story, although because the main character is Martin Keane, a "second-rate" novelist, the tale is scattered with the pages of his Ireland-set thriller, lending the otherwise conventional storyline a hint of the metafictional games that Milligan enjoyed in *Human Target* and *X-Statix*.

When Keane's wife goes missing, his conflict with his father reaches boiling point and he begins to uncover Bronx-based scandals that extend through five generations of his family. The psychology is quite basic, but *The Bronx Kill* has a thrilling clarity that *Greek Street* lacks. James Romberger's art is perfect for the kind of hasty reading the story demands, with emotive touches that lend the story a smell of its own – that elusive criminal bouquet.

Thom Hutchinson

Marvellous Memories

SPIDER-MAN
Season 3

1968 PG 125 mins
CREATOR: Stan Lee
CAST: Paul Soles, Peg Dixon, Paul Kligman
PRICE: £14.99
OUT: Now
DVD EXTRAS: None
★★★☆☆

FANTASTIC FOUR
Season 1

1978 U 297 mins
CREATORS: Stan Lee, Jack Kirby
CAST: Ted Cassidy, Mike Road, Frank Welker, Ginny Tyler
PRICE: £19.99
OUT: Now
DVD EXTRAS: None
★★★☆☆

"Spider-man! Spider-man! Does whatever a spider can!" Yep, it's the cartoon with *that* theme tune, made by Ralph Bakshi, no less. Poorly drawn, barely animated and predictably plotted, *Spider-Man* is still charming and grown-up in a psychedelic, '60s way that other Marvel offerings aren't.

The later *Fantastic Four* cartoon (the second of three versions) is less fun, being the one where they took out the Human Torch. Instead, we have Herbie the robot, whose nasal tones are oft heard in the series as he argues violently with Ben Grimm. All. The. Fricking. Time.

It's not right, but it is unintentionally hilarious. Witness Magneto, pootling about in a rubbish car and cussing everyone he meets like a grumpy pensioner. It's funny, for sure, but hardly Marvel-ous.

Guy Haley

It looks rubbish, but it's genuinely charming.

Reed Richards, aghast at his cartoon.

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EXPLORING THE **MUST-READ CLASSICS** OF COMICDOM

THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

FRANK MILLER 1986

Jes Bickham remembers when giants walked the Earth and comics changed forever...

Batman, back after a decade's absence, soaring through the air over Gotham City: "The rain on my chest is a baptism."

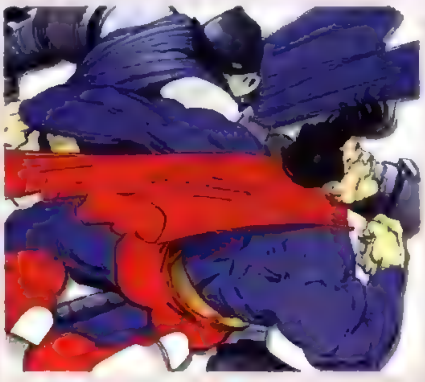
Superman, now no more than a government stooge, holding a Soviet tank above his head and pondering the problem of Bruce Wayne: "We must not remind them that giants walk the Earth."

The Joker, dead at last in the Tunnel Of Love: "Whatever's in him rustles as it leaves."

The Dark Knight, fist raised, about to teach the Man Of Steel a painful lesson: "It's way past time you *learned* – what it *means* – to be a *man*..."

Here is a succession of indelible images and words long seared into the cultural consciousness – some of the most memorable scenes in comic history, drawn from a still jaw-dropping reinvention of Batman and his world. Often spoken of in the same breath as Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, which arrived in the same year, Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* is popularly held to be a potent signifier of comics growing up. Whether that's actually true is up for debate – 24 years down the line, it's possible to argue that it's po-faced, violent and right-wing rather than 'grown-up' – but what's certain is that it remains undeniably brilliant, and that it endures.

We'd never seen a Batman quite like this before. Here, the vigilante is ten years retired and Bruce Wayne is an empty, diminished man. His return to the streets of Gotham coincides with the supposedly rehabilitated Harvey Dent becoming Two-Face once again, and what follows is a brutal fight for the soul of Gotham City and, indeed, America. It culminates in a dramatic showdown against Superman, who has been sent by the President himself to destroy the Dark Knight, who has become a political liability.

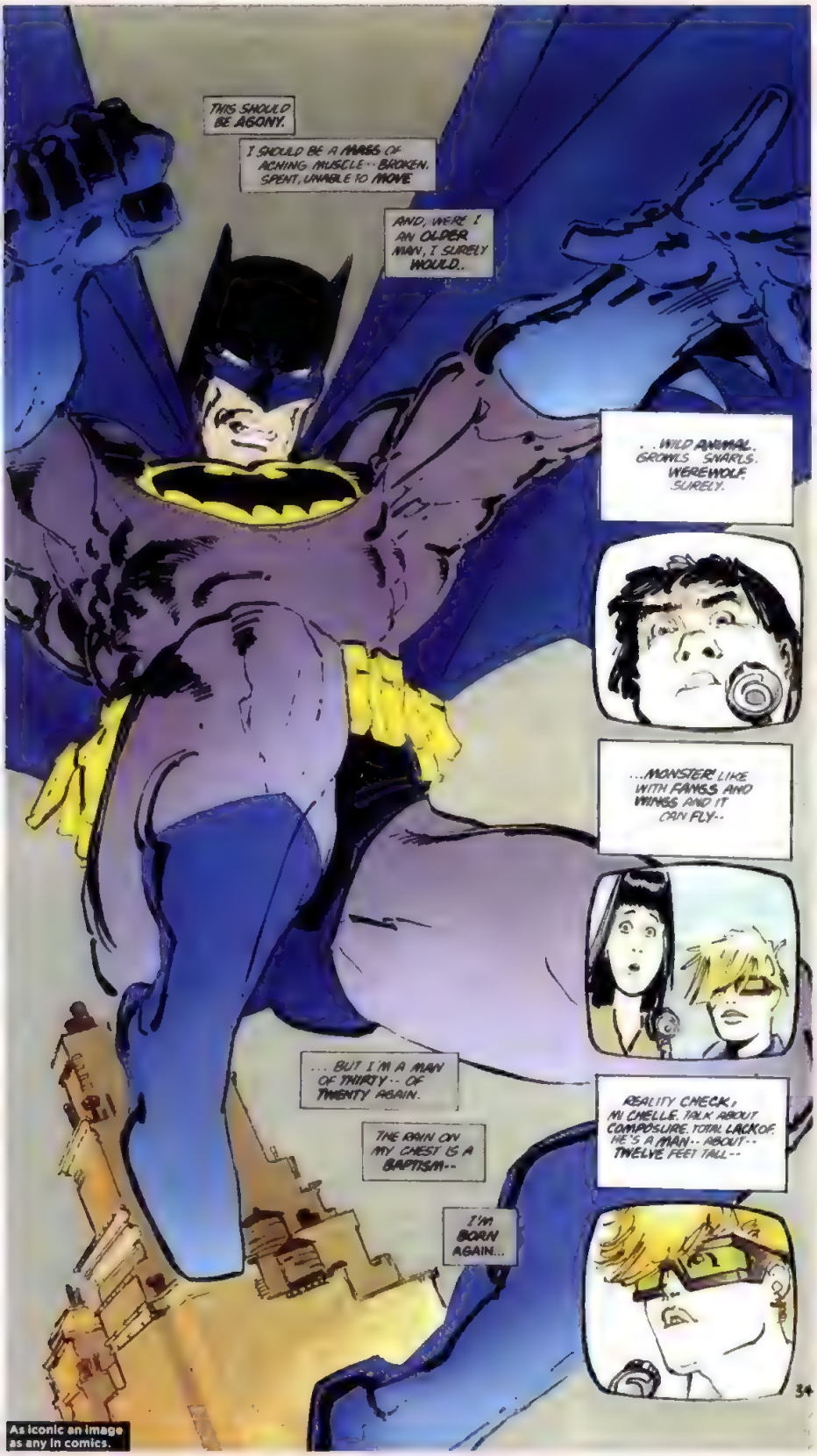


What Miller did was give Batman and his world a veneer of realism and social context. We see Batman's return debated in the media, by the man on the street and at the highest levels of government; to some he's a saviour, to others a dangerous psychopath who's taken the law into his own hands. We see the aged Bruce Wayne, broken and battered by his night-time exploits, held together by his own indomitable will. We see the Joker rise again in tandem with Batman's reappearance, prefiguring Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* in its conceit of 'escalation'; the idea that a figure like Batman will draw the crazies out of the woodwork, establishing an equal and opposite – and utterly malign – response. Here is a horrifying world you can believe in: Batman and his carnival of adversaries drawn through the prism of '80s America and only too plausible against a backdrop of global unrest and nuclear threat. Everything's as you know it, but completely different; Robin's a girl, Superman works for the government, Two Face is flawless on the outside but eternally, awfully scarred underneath.

Every legend needs an end and Miller provides it here in a brutal, punishing capstone to the Caped Crusader's career. He'd provide a divisive, unnecessary sequel in the colourful, crazed *The Dark Knight Strikes Again* – itself seemingly a reaction against *DKR*'s unremitting dourness and a love letter to Silver Age comics. But *The Dark Knight Returns* stands proudly and alone, as definitive a *Batman* tale as any that have been told before or since. CH

"HIS RETURN TO THE STREETS OF GOTHAM COINCIDES WITH THE SUPPOSEDLY REHABILITATED HARVEY DENT BECOMING TWO-FACE ONCE AGAIN"

© DC Comics


THIS SHOULD BE AGONY.
I SHOULD BE A MASS OF ACHING MUSCLE -- BROKEN, SPENT, UNABLE TO MOVE
AND, WERE I AN OLDER MAN, I SURELY WOULD..
...WILD ANIMAL. GROWLS. SNARLS. WEREWOLF. SURELY.
...MONSTER! LIKE WITH FANGS AND WINGS AND IT CAN FLY--
...BUT I'M A MAN OF THIRTY -- OF TWENTY AGAIN.
REALITY CHECK, MICHELLE. TALK ABOUT COMPOSURE. TOTAL LACK OF. HE'S A MAN -- ABOUT -- TWELVE FEET TALL --
THE RAIN ON MY CHEST IS A BAPTISM--
I'M BORN AGAIN...
34

As iconic an image as any in comics.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We'll be looking at a different classic comic in every instalment of Comic Club, and we want to hear what you think of them! In the next issue of *Comic Heroes* we'll be looking at Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon's magnificently profane *Preacher*. Send your thoughts to comicheroes@futurenet.com and we'll print them in issue two!

WHAT YOU THOUGHT...

Batman, while not unique, really is a hero without powers and this issue dealt with his mortality and ageing – something you rarely see in comics. I'm not sure I like the female Robin. Not that Robin can't be female, it just felt like a Robin character was forced into the book and there was no real need for her. I was also surprised by Gordon's borderline disgust that a woman was replacing him.

I think this is a really interesting book, and I can see how it impacted other writers, but it didn't live up to the hype for me. This could be because the ideas are nothing new and they've been redone a number of times in more recent books (ones that I've been exposed to), so it doesn't have the impact it would have had in its original context.
Wayne1421

It's no longer quite so clear what *DKR* was reacting against, because its approach has become commonplace. It's well plotted and a damn good read, but its relentless grimness can be exhausting and means we run the risk of disengaging with the characters. The Just Hero becomes the Good Soldier, and while we may admire and appreciate the latter, we're more likely to identify with the former. The effects of *The Dark Knight Returns* were clear – foremost among them being the decision to top the continuity's Jason Todd soon afterwards. Nothing could be taken for granted and a more mature market – and more critically respectable plaudits – were explored. "Comics aren't just for kids!" soon adorned the covers of most DC titles, and its 'mature readers' imprint, Vertigo, thrived. More than Moore's *Watchmen*, *The Dark Knight Returns* helped broaden the appeal and understanding of comics. Unfortunately, many of its imitators equated 'radical reinvention' with 'violent and unpleasant', completely missing the point of the social and political satire of the work, and spawned a decade of irony-free, angsty ret-con grimness, where the deconstruction and debasement of previously chirpy, cheery heroes became the norm.
Happy-Hangman

I borrowed *DKR* off a friend and was blown away. I thought the art was a bit odd compared to the clean lines I was used to, but the story was amazing. This was like *Dirty Harry* in comic form – something for grown-ups, packaged for kids! I loved all the talking heads stuff on Gotham TV, and the fact that Robin was a plucky young girl. I liked that Batman was so protective of her, and that he had the sheer balls to take on the government puppet that was Superman. It would be years until I realised who 'Oliver' was, but that didn't matter. For me, it was the introduction to the other side of comics. I still devoured the fun stuff, but I went on to seek out the likes of *Black Orchid*, *Watchmen* and *The Killing Joke*. I still appreciate the pulpy as well as the cerebral, but *DKR* will always have a place in my heart. It's goddamned brilliant.
Emceehamster

The Dark Knight Returns was one of the first stories that made it clear just how much the character was his costumed identity first and foremost, while his secret identity was just a means to an end. This was made obvious at the start of the story where as Bruce Wayne, despite the years since his retirement, he's not moved on. He's still wifeless and heirless, brooding in his mansion and spending his time trying to find something to fill the void – even considering if perishing in a racecar crash would be "a good death." Then once he becomes Batman again and we see the first splash page of him in costume, the narration tells us how he feels like "a man of 20 again," and it's like he's just picked up where he left off. Maybe that's what was missing from a lot of the stories influenced by *DKR* in later years. They made him obsessed, and they made him paranoid and use questionable methods, but the reason he did so was his sense of duty – it was a burden he didn't think he could let go of. *DKR* made being Batman something he *loved* and didn't *want* to let go of.
Fricky

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MY INSPIRATION
MIKE PERKINS

Mike Perkins is a British comics artist perhaps best known for his work on Marvel's adaptation of Stephen King's *The Stand*. However, he's also worked on *2000 AD*, *Spider-Man*, *X-Men*, *Fantastic Four* and *Union Jack* for Marvel, among many other gigs. He tells *Comic Heroes* about his formative artistic influences...

1 I remember picking up *Titans* from an extremely young age. These were the landscape form black-and-white reprints of Marvel comics. Truly an early inspiration.

2 *Captain Britain*, when it was released in 1976, just blew my mind. I think it was the first time I realised that Britain had its own comic business, rather then just reprints of American stuff...

3 Along came *2000 AD* and *Doctor Who Weekly*, and most prominently in the latter, Absolom Daak – Dalek Killer! My ten-year-old eyes studied Steve Dillon's artwork on it for ages and it has, since then, embedded itself in my soul!

4 There are three ages of *2000 AD* that I love. The first was when I bought the second issue solely for the Biotronic Man stickers. I picked up issue 74 straight off the stands when I saw that fantastic Mike McMahon cover. From issue 240 I started to buy it every week.

5 Working in Wolverhampton comic shop The Place, on Saturdays when I was still at school, I came across a whole new universe of titles I didn't know about – including *Crisis On Infinite Earths*, *Longshot* and *Camelot 3000*.

6 A lot of my artistic inspirations come from that 'golden age' of *2000 AD* – from Brian Bolland, Ian Gibson and Steve Dillon to Glenn Fabry, Steve Yeowell, Colin MacNeil and beyond. Across the pond, I've had the great fortune to collaborate with George Pérez, Rick Leonardi and Jackson 'Butch' Guice.

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